Examining the Multicultural Experiences of Chinese Graduate Students at the University of Toronto through the Lens of Critical Multiculturalism

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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2015

Abstract

This research project investigates Chinese international students' multicultural experiences. The existing literature shows that language barrier, cultural adjustment and social support are the major factors that influence international students' life abroad. However, with liberal multiculturalism as the mainstream ideology, multicultural research appears to have a liberal multiculturalism tendency. In this research project, critical multiculturalism is employed as the theoretical framework to avoid the negative impacts from liberal multiculturalism. The study is based on the narratives of four Chinese international students at the University of Toronto. The results of the study show that the lack of recognition of cultural diversity, the evaluation of cultural diversity in a deficit model, failure to show empathy with students from different cultural backgrounds, the assumption of a "sameness" among international and domestic students, and stress to assimilate into the dominant culture in the public sphere contribute to the pressure faced by international students.
## Table of Contents

### Abstract/ ii

### Chapter 1 Introduction/1

### Chapter 2 Review of Literature/4

2.1 Introduction/4
2.2 Definition of Multicultural Experience/4
2.3 Factors That Negatively Impact Students' Multicultural Experiences/6
  2.3.1 Language Barrier/6
  2.3.2 Cultural Adjustment/8
  2.3.3 Social Support/9
2.4 Factors That Positively Impact Students' Multicultural Experiences/11
2.5 Conclusion/12

### Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework/14

3.1 Introduction/14
3.2 A Liberal Multiculturalism Tendency/14
3.3 A Rationale for Critical Multiculturalism as the Interpretative Framework/18
3.4 Conclusion/20

### Chapter 4. Methodology/21

4.1 Introduction/21
4.2 Research Method/21
4.3 Participants/23
4.4 Data Collection/26

4.5 Thematic Analysis and Chronological Method/27

4.6 Research Positionality and Study Trustworthiness/29

4.7 Conclusion/30

Chapter 5. Stories of Four Students/32

5.1 Introduction/32

5.2 Ted’s Narrative and Analysis/32
  5.2.1 Ted’s Narrative/32
  5.2.2 Analysis of Ted’s Narratives/43

5.3 Zac’s Narratives and Analysis/ 45
  5.3.1 Zac’s Narrative/ 45
  5.3.2 Analysis of Zac’s Narrative/ 53

5.4 Donna’s Narrative and Analysis/ 54
  5.4.1 Donnas’s Narrative/ 54
  5.4.2 Analysis of Donna’s Narratives/ 61

5.5 Aron’s Narrative and Analysis/ 63
  5.5.1 Aron’s Narrative/ 63
  5.5.2 Analysis of Aron’s narratives/74

5.6 Conclusion/76

Chapter 6. Voices from International Students — an Analysis of the Multicultural Experiences of International Students/77

6.1 Introduction/77
6.2 Using a Second Language and International Students’ Multicultural Experience/77

6.2.1 The Impacts of Using a Second Language/78

6.2.2 Changes of the Impacts of Using a Second Language/79

6.2.3 More Than Language Proficiency—Language Barrier, Cultural Differences and Cultural Recognition/82

6.3 Social Equity and International Students’ Multicultural Experience/85

6.3.1 The Impacts of the “Open and Free” Atmosphere/85

6.3.2 Seeking Support in the “Open and Free” Atmosphere/87

6.3.3 Identity Problem in Finding a Job/88

6.3.4 The Inequity Beneath the Equal Surface/89

6.4 Chinese Community and International Students’ Multicultural Experience/91

6.4.1 The Impacts of the Chinese Community on International students/91

6.4.2 Different Perspectives/94

6.4.3 Strong and Week multiculturalism/95

6.5 Conclusion/96

Chapter 7. Conclusion and Considerations/98

References/102
Chapter 1

Introduction

Ranked as the world's 7th most popular destination for international students, Canada has seen a rapid increase of the number of international students (CIBC, 2012). The multicultural experiences of these international students have influenced not only the students themselves but also the host countries. In recent years, much research on multicultural experiences has taken place. However, with liberal multiculturalism as the mainstream ideology, multicultural research appears to have a liberal multiculturalism tendency (McLaren & Ryoo, 2012). Lacking analysis of larger social structures, presuming an equal situation between international and domestic students, and forcing stereotypes on students from different cultures are the negative impacts of the liberal multiculturalism tendency. (Guo, 2013; May, 2012; Smart et al, 2000)

Despite the fact that most of the research on multicultural experiences has reported positive outcomes, in the research with a liberal tendency, the benefits of multicultural experiences are always explored from the side of host countries, and whether the multicultural experiences are meaningful or not are determined by the positive outcomes that benefit the host countries. In the research examining what factors weaken or enhance the benefits and disadvantages of multicultural experiences of international students, the focus is located on the individual’s cultural background and prior experiences. (Ward, 2001; Leung et al, 2008; Leung & Chiu, 2010; Yakunina et al, 2013). How these
factors and the influences of these factors change with the accumulation of their multicultural experience after they arrive in host country are seldom examined. By focusing on the experiences of international students through studies based on their previous cultural background and prior experiences, students from different cultures are given an ossified, unchangeable stereotype.

This research takes a different perspective. It employs a qualitative approach, using narrative research to explore the multicultural experiences of Chinese international students at the University of Toronto. Seven Chinese graduate students at University of Toronto were interviewed to explore their multicultural experiences in Toronto. To avoid the negative impacts of liberal multiculturalism and to give priority to the influence of systemic factors’ influence on the students’ multicultural experiences, this research will take critical multiculturalism as its theoretical framework.

The three main purposes of this research are: firstly, to explore what factors contribute to forming beneficial multicultural experiences or increasing the difficulties related to multicultural experiences. Priority will be given to the analyses of systemic factors faced by the group of international students rather than personal factors; secondly, how, with the accumulation of their multicultural experiences, the influence of the factors changes; lastly, how the international students perceive the influences of the changes and what contributes to these changes.
The study provided valuable insights into international students’ multicultural experiences, and the findings of this study explored the factors that have seldom been examined in the existing literature influenced by liberal multiculturalism.
Chapter 2
Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine how multicultural experience is defined in the previous literature, and develop the definition of multicultural experience that will be applied in this thesis. The redefinition of multicultural experiences seeks to expand the meaning of this term and include more individual narratives that can help us understand international students’ experiences.

An account of the factors that will impact international students negatively and positively from the existing literature will also be developed. Existing literature examining international students’ multicultural experiences has reported the challenges faced by students and the factors that may negatively impact their multicultural experiences. These factors vary from emotional instability to academic performance, and may change during the phases of cultural adjustment (Ryan & Twibell, 2000). Besides the negative factors, previous literature also shows that students can benefit from their multicultural experiences by enhancing creativity, reducing intergroup bias and developing multicultural sensitivity.

2.2 Definition of Multicultural Experience

The research on the experiences of international students in host counties began in the mid 1960s (Smart et al, 2000). In recent years, with the impact of globalization, an increasing number of students prefer to study at a university
abroad (Healey, 2008; Russell et al, 2010; Townsend & Wan, 2007). Ranked as the world’s 7th most popular destination for international students, Canada has seen a rapid increase of the number of international students since 2001– from 136,000 to over 265,000, a 94% increase (CIBC, 2012). The multicultural experiences of these international students have influenced not only the students themselves but also the host countries. To explore the significance and to expand our understanding of these experiences, much research on multicultural experience has taken place in recent years.

In most of this research, the term “multicultural experience” is defined as “all direct and indirect experiences of encountering or interacting with the elements and/or members of foreign cultures (Tadmor et al, 2012; Leung et al, 2008, p. 169).” This definition helps researchers to decide what kinds of experiences are considered to be “multicultural”. However, it lacks a quantitative way to examine the exposure to the elements of foreign cultures.

In the research that focuses on the quantitative analysis of multicultural experiences, this term is defined as “the combination of time of study and quality of interactions with people from different cultures (Townsend & Wan, 2007, p. 197).” In this way, the term “multicultural experience” is defined to cover the length of time of exposure to different cultures and the depth of cultural experiences that individuals have. However, this definition limits multicultural experience to the interactions between people and ignores the other factors that may contribute to the exposure to a different culture.
Therefore, in this literature review, the term “multicultural experience” is defined as the combination of time and quality of exposure of international students to the elements and/or members of foreign cultures. On the one hand, this definition covers not only interpersonal but also other factors from different cultures that will have impact on the international students, for example, the academic traditions, social norms and values that are rooted in the culture (Zhang & Zhang, 2013); on the other hand, by taking the length of time and quality of exposure into consideration, it gives spaces to analyze the possible impact that different quantity and quality of the exposure may lead to (Townsend & Wan, 2007).

2.3 Factors That Negatively Impact Students’ Multicultural Experiences

2.3.1 Language Barrier

Much of the research on international students reports that English language proficiency is recognized as one of the major challenges faced by these students (Zhai, 2002). In the research focused on Asian students, the language barrier is also perceived as the greatest difficulty in their life abroad (Hsieh, 2006; Yeh & Yang, 2003).

Limited English language proficiency impeded international students’ potential in academic progress, class participation, social integration and support seeking (Yeh & Yang, 2003; Trice, 2001; Cadman, 2000; Canon, 2000; Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Selvadurai, 1992). Besides the difficulties caused by limited English proficiency,
using a second language in an unfamiliar environment may also cause vulnerability and distress (Roth & Harama, 2000). In a research paper about the process of international students adjusting into host countries, Chen reported that a Chinese international student studying in the U.S. described the language barrier she was faced with as a language handicap, and that she found it almost made it impossible for her to participate in class discussion because all the other English speaking students spoke so fast that she couldn't cut in (Chen, 1996).

Stories of students with limited language proficiency like this are being reported in much of the research on international students, especially research conducted in English language program. (Hsieh, 2006; Yeh & Yang, 2003; Hsieh, 2006; Zhai, 2002)

But language barriers are not only faced by international students with limited language proficiency. Chen also reported a story from Cherry, another Chinese student who is the "best English speaker" among all the participants in her research. As described in the research paper, a language professor commented on her English saying: “You can’t tell she is a foreign student.” However, Cherry still felt embarrassed when talking in class because she thought her classmates could not understand her and she kept feeling frustrated about her language proficiency (Chen, 1996).

In more recent studies on international students, language barriers are being reported not only in relation to limited language proficiency, but also the power relationship implied by this phenomenon (Hsieh, 2006; Yeh & Drost, 2002). For
example, Zhang (Zhang & Zhang, 2013) described in her research “I am not what you thought I should be”: Learning Accounts of Chinese International Students in Canada the pressure she felt when speaking and writing in English during her study in Canada, even though she was a “well-received” English teacher in China and her English proficiency “earned her a good job.” She discussed that this language barrier is the result of lacking interest in including non-western culture in the curriculum, and the unchangeable stereotype forced on international students.

2.3.2 Cultural Adjustment

The process of adjusting to life in a foreign country can be stressful due to many reasons. Besides the barrier of using a second language, adjusting to cultural differences is another stressor in international students’ experiences abroad (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen & Van, 2002; Hsieh, 2006). According to previous research, the more different international students’ cultural backgrounds, the more difficulty they may find to adjust to the life in host countries. As for Chinese students whose original culture is widely different from western culture, they may find the process even more stressful (Hsieh, 2006).

Deep-seated cultural meaning also plays a significant role in the adjustment process (Malakolunthu & Selan, 2011). International students have to adjust to different educational systems that embody the wide difference between eastern and western cultures. However, when facing these differences in the classroom,
international students find themselves being isolated and find it hard to participate in a class discussion (Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015; Zhang & Zhang, 2013; Chen, 1996). For example, Chen (1996) found that international students describe themselves as outsiders in the classroom. They found the topic discussed in class is loosely relevant to their prior knowledge, and their unique knowledge contributes little to the class. Moreover, in some other research, researchers have discussed how different learning styles may contribute to the development of a “reticent, passive and lacking critical thinking” stereotype of Chinese international students (Zhang & Zhang, 2013; Grimshaw, 2011).

2.3.3 Social Support

Moving to a new country sometimes may mean the deprivation of the student’s social support. Previous research has reported that the main resource for international students to seek support is from their parents or friends in their original social network. However, relocating life and study to a new country far away from home makes it difficult to seek support from international students’ original social network hard. (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002)

When seeking support in the host country, international students turn to their fellows from the same country instead of seeking support from locals because of the language barrier, cultural differences and fear of stereotyping (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985). However, research has shown that for international students, less connection with domestic students may lead to feelings of
alienation and of being less well-adjusted to the host country. (Williams & Johnson, 2011; Yeh and Inose, 2003; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen & Van Horn, 2002)

As for the counseling and information services provided by schools, research has shown a less frequent use of services among international students, and the information and counseling services are not adequate and lack empathy to international students (Yi, Giseala & Kishimoto, 2003; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen & Van Horn, 2002; Robertson, Line, Jones and Thomas, 2000). According to a study conducted in the United States, which examined the utilization of counseling services by over 500 hundred students within six years, the counseling services are not widely used by international students, and some students find the services fail to meet what they need (Yi, Giseala & Kishimoto, 2003).

Support from staff at school may also be limited for international students compared to domestic students. As argued in a research paper involving staff’s perspective on international students, despite the fact that most staff show their willingness to support international students, their lack of awareness and consideration of the stress, language barriers and cultural differences faced by international students make it hard to develop a more inclusive learning environment (Roberson, Line, Jones & Thomas, 2000).

2.4 Factors That Positively Impact Students’ Multicultural Experiences
In the review of multicultural experiences of international students, Smart (2000) not only reported on culture shock, stress and anxieties faced by the international students, but also highlighted the positive and beneficial personal and social outcomes. According to research in recent years focusing on the international students’ experiences abroad, multicultural experiences can be beneficial in various ways.

The first one is enhancing creativity. According to studies on exploring the relationship between multicultural experiences and creativity, multicultural experiences enhance creativity in three ways. First, it affords the individuals access to unconventional knowledge, helps individuals develop higher cognitive complexity, and enables them to recognize and make use of alternative viewpoints from other cultures (Benet-Martinez et al, 2006; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006; Leung et al, 2008; Leung & Chiu, 2010). Second, people with multicultural experiences can respond flexibly to the cultural elements that are salient in a situation when they switch between different cultures (Fu et al, 2007; Hong & Kung, 1997; Hong et al, 2000). Lastly, multicultural experience helps to develop receptiveness to unconventional ideas from foreign culture by offering individuals the chance to see how cultural elements have dynamic functions and multiple meanings (Chiu et al, 2006; Leung & Chiu, 2010).

Besides the benefits of enhancing creativity, research has shown the facilitative effects of multicultural experiences in reducing intergroup bias. Tadmor et al (2012) report in their paper that the reduction of intergroup bias
can be achieved by the effect of multicultural experiences in reducing the endorsement for stereotypes and symbolic racism, and diminishing discrimination and prejudice in hiring decisions after they examined the effects of multicultural experiences through six studies.

The development of multicultural sensitivity is another important benefit of multicultural experiences. According to the findings of research taking place in higher educational settings, students with multicultural experiences have higher levels of both personal awareness and professional knowledge of cultural differences. It has also been found that the multicultural experiences cultivate personal desire and perception to serve underserved multicultural population (Gupta et al, 1999; Godkin et al, 2001).

2.5 Conclusion

The literature on the multicultural experiences examines various aspects, and describes the negative factors international students are still faced with and the positive factors international students can benefit from. However, most of the literature does not examine whether and how these factors will change with the accumulation of students’ multicultural experiences, and how these factors contribute to international students’ multicultural experiences when we locate these factors in a broader social context. This will be investigated in the upcoming chapters.
Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

Multiculturalism in higher education emerged as an area of interest during the 1960s and 1970s as a result of resistance against colonial regimes around the world and activism for civil rights in the United States (Vavrus, 2010). However, multiculturalism in practice in higher education varies significantly—from liberal variations to more critical types.

In this chapter, the liberal multiculturalism tendency in the previous studies on multicultural experiences of international students is examined, and the negative impacts of liberal multiculturalism are explored. To avoid the negative impacts of liberal multiculturalism, a critical multiculturalism approach is employed in this thesis. This approach benefits the research at both the macro level by giving analysis priority to the social context and the micro level by regarding each individual as the holder of knowledge based on their unique personal experiences.

3.2 A Liberal Multiculturalism Tendency

While the extensive research in the area of multicultural experiences has reported both positive and negative impacts, the liberal multiculturalism tendency permeating the area cannot be ignored.

As demonstrated by McLaren and Ryoo (2012) in “Critical Theory and Multicultural Education (Perspectives in Education)”, liberal multiculturalism is a
form commonly used when dealing with cultural diversity and cultural differences. Especially in recent years, liberal multiculturalism is believed to be the mainstream ideology, and multicultural research appears to have a liberal multiculturalism tendency.

Smart (2000) demonstrated that a characteristic of international students’ “adjustment” literature; there is “the implicit underlying assumption that effective social interactions between local and international students are dependent on international students’ “adjustment” to the host culture, and that once they have adapted, the two groups will happily interact and mix with one another (Smart et al, 2000, p.11).” This assumption has been criticized because in reality, both the international students and local students groups have a responsibility. As suggested by Furnham and Bochner “…the distancing of the foreign student from the host culture may be a two-way process. There is no doubt that part of the problem is due to the insensitivity, indifference and perhaps even hostility of host members towards the strangers in their midst (Furnham and Bocher, 1982, p. 193).”

The perspective that the problems international students meet in their multicultural experiences are only caused and should be resolved by international students themselves is a typical one in liberal multiculturalism.

Liberal multiculturalism does acknowledge cultural diversity. However, its recognition of cultural diversity is based on the premise that there is a universal human “race” and presumes an intellectual sameness (Guo, 2013). In this way, an
environment of equality is created, and minority groups in this environment are educated that they can “make it” by working hard. However, “pride in one's heritage is not a panacea for the effects of years of oppression” (Kinzeloe & Steinberg, 1997). Besides, liberal multiculturalism understands “culture” in an ossified way, seeing it as “unique and unchanging, fixed and final, ultimately determined by ethnic origin (May, 2012).”

Despite the fact that the weaknesses of liberal multiculturalism have long been critiqued, it is still prevailing in higher education and multicultural research. It is not hard to find that some of the research in the area of multiculturalism has embodied the weaknesses of liberal multiculturalism.

The most salient embodiment of liberal multiculturalism is statements such as, the problems faced by international students in their multicultural experiences are caused by these students themselves and should be resolved by the students themselves, which is similar to the “assumption” referred to by Smart (Smart et al, 2000). For example, when coping with acculturative stress, international students are often encouraged to rely on their personal and multicultural strengths (Yakunina et al, 2013).

In the research that has examined what moderates the beneficial effects of multicultural experiences, most researchers only examine the personal factors of international students and report that the limit of the beneficial effects of multicultural experiences is due to the individual’s personality (Such as the need for closure, the ability to prosper under condition of strain) and prior experience
(such as prior knowledge and preexisting conceptual structures) (Leung et al, 2008; Leung & Chiu, 2010; Yakunina et al, 2013).

As concluded by Ward (2001), most research about challenges faced by international students has been conducted from the viewpoint of the international students, but little information is included about host counties. By doing so, the students’ experiences in the research are isolated from their social context. The responsibility of integration is placed on students and integration is regarded as a one-way process instead of a mutual process. In addition, the emphasis on the individual’s prior experiences, personalities and cultural backgrounds indicates that students come from a different culture that is unchanging and final. The failure to see culture as changeable and the lack of interest in understanding cultural differences lead to the stereotypes of students from different cultures, and the factors from the host culture that may influence students’ multicultural experiences become invisible (Yeh, & Drost, 2002).

Moreover, by emphasizing that people share an intellectual sameness, liberal multiculturalism insists that people can be seen as equal. (McLaren & Ryoo, 2012) In this way, the factors from the larger social structures that may lead to the reduction of the beneficial effects of multicultural experiences are ignored. As discussed by Zhang when she examined the academic performance of Chinese international students, the tendency to ignore and devalue the academic traditions in non-Western cultures in Western academia and stereotypes of
Asian students make the classroom less inclusive and make the academic experiences harder for these international students (Zhang & Zhang, 2013).

However, the contextual factors in the host society are important to the outcomes of the multicultural experiences of these international students (Furnham and Bocher, 1982, Williams & Johnson, 2011). Another approach to multiculturalism is needed for the multicultural experiences research to avoid these weaknesses associated with liberal multiculturalism.

3.3 A Rationale for Critical Multiculturalism as the Interpretative Framework

In this research, critical multiculturalism provides the interpretative framework in order to achieve the three main purposes of this research: firstly, to explore what factors contribute to forming beneficial multicultural experiences or increasing the difficulties related to multicultural experiences. Priority will be given to the analyses of systemic factors faced by the group of international students rather than personal factors; secondly, how, with the accumulation of their multicultural experiences, the influence of the factors changes; lastly, how the international students perceive the influences of the changes and what contributes to these changes.

The roots of critical theory are often traced back to Hegeliansm, Western European Marxism, and the Frankfurt School (McLaren & Ryoo, 2012). Within social science, critical theory is often seen as “an emancipatory philosophy focused on historicizing, critiquing, and exposing human relationships of
domination and subordination (McLaren & Ryoo, 2012, p. 3).” By questioning the existing ideology and relating inequity to power relationships and social structures, critical theory has enabled many philosophical approaches to create new theories, such as critical race theory. Critical multiculturalism is one of these new theories. Developed through a critical theory lens, the idea of critical multiculturalism emerged in the 1990s in order to build “more equitable, socially just, antiracist, anti-hegemonic” educational institutions (McLaren & Ryoo, 2013, p.3).

For multicultural experience research, there are two main strengths of the critical multicultural approach.

First, at the micro level, critical multiculturalism acknowledges that student perceptions and experiences will be affected by personal worldviews, which are defined as a person's beliefs, values, and assumptions about the world, and worldview is influenced not only by race and ethnicity but also by other cultural influences (Sue & Sue, 2013). In this way, it breaks the stereotypes, which are established by seeing culture as unchanging and final, and validates personal experience.

Second, at the macro level, critical multiculturalism gives priority to the analyses of larger social structures, which lead to inequity and oppression (May, 2012; McLaren & Ryoo, 2012). These larger social structures include racism, sexism, classism and colonialism. It moves beyond the idea of “universal human race” and breaks the “equality” created by the assumption of this sameness. In
this way, it is able to analyze multicultural experiences as a two-way process and locate them within a broader social context.

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, to avoid the negative impacts of lacking analysis of larger social structures, presuming an equal situation between international and local students, and forcing stereotypes on students from different cultures —all of which are inherent in liberal multiculturalism — this thesis will apply a critical multiculturalism approach to examine the multicultural experiences of international students.
Chapter 4
Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Although it is unclear when narrative started to serve as the base for qualitative inquiry, nowadays, the use of narratives is commonly seen in social research (Riessman, 2008). Originating in literature, narrative inquiry is a multidisciplinary enterprise that can be applied to a broad area such as anthropology, history, sociology, and economics (Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011).

Wells (2011) concluded in his book *Narrative inquiry* that narrative not only is defined in relation to events that can be incorporated chronologically, and serve as stories that have a valued end-point or provide meaning for explanation, but also includes experiences in a much broader sense. As defined by Squire (2008), narratives “sequential and meaningful are definitively human; ‘re-present’ experience, reconstituting it, as well as expressing it; display transformation or change.” (p. 42)

Based on narrative inquiry, this research used stories collected from the interviews to serve as empirical sources. Regarding the participants as the knowledge holders for this study, using the stories from participants allows their voice to be heard, and brings light to their experiences.

4.2 Research Method

Based on narrative inquiry, this research employs counter-story telling as the research method. Defined by Solorzano and Yosso (2002) as “both a method
of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told (that is, those on the margins of society), and as a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse—the majoritarian story”, counter-story telling gives space to the often unheard voice of marginalized groups and minority groups, whose stories are being obscured by the dominant ideology. By challenging the dominant ideology through stories different from the majoritarian story, counter-story telling plays not only a powerful role in creating new meaning for people's life experiences, but also in challenging the old myths (Delgado, 1989).

Counter-story telling is a method where different stories from minority groups are collected and brought into visibility. As Williams (2004) argued by describing a different experience, people outside the dominant culture may have the chance to “create a narrative that is visible to all”. However, telling a different story that could serve to challenge the dominant ideology doesn't necessarily mean that the counter-stories always need to be created directly in response to the majoritarian stories. As warned by some scholars, “by responding only to a standard story, we let it dominate the discourse” (Ikemoto, 1997; Delgado, 1989). Therefore, as Williams (2004) suggested, a simple story from an individual outside of the dominant culture is enough to create a narrative.

Counter-story telling is consistent with the critical multiculturalism interpretative framework employed in this research. Widely applied in Critical Race Theory, its ability to give new meaning to people's experiences and
challenge the dominant ideology can be also applied to critical multiculturalism research, which challenges liberal multiculturalism and examine individual’s life experience located within the broader social and historical context.

The counter-story telling method helps to challenge liberal multiculturalism. By regarding international students as the holders of unique knowledge, this research method allows stories to be collected and analyzed in order to bring the unheard or not often told stories into visibility. The themes emerging through the narratives will be rooted in the perspectives of these students through their life stories related to multicultural experiences. Instead of regarding international students as the only ones sharing the main responsibility of integration and adjustment, counter-story telling gives students a chance to talk about how the contexts of their being have influenced them. In addition, the analysis of stories spread over a number of months also makes it possible for us to see how the overall accumulation of multicultural experiences has influenced students, which helps not only to break the ossified stereotype imposed on students from different cultures by liberal multiculturalism, but also to locate the individuals’ story in the broader social and historical context, and gives priority to the analysis of institutional and social factors instead of only focusing on the previous individual experience.

4.3 Participants

Seven Chinese international graduate students from the University of Toronto were interviewed. Students were recruited from a diversity of
backgrounds to enrich the narratives collected for the research. Three students are newcomers to Toronto (have been in Toronto less than six months). Two of them are students who have lived in Toronto for two to three years. The last two students have finished their graduate study at the University of Toronto and are finding jobs or have worked in Toronto.

This design is consistent with the critical multiculturalism framework. Recognizing that individuals can be influenced by their own experiences, students from different groups can provide knowledge of how they see their experiences, how their unique perspectives are formed with the accumulation of multicultural experiences, and the different contexts where their experiences locate.

Being abroad for the first time and spending most of their time studying and living in Toronto was another inclusion criterion for selecting participants. This is because multicultural experiences vary with the social and cultural contexts of the place the students are living in. This criterion helps to locate the students within a similar social context. In this way, their multicultural experiences and reflections on the system are more comparable.

The first group of participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Participants in the second and third groups of students were recruited through peers I know, as well as through snowball sampling. A Letter of Invitation was sent through email to these students to invite them participate in this research (See Appendix A).
For the snowball sampling, I sent an email to the people I already knew to ask them to send the Letter of Invitation to graduate students they knew (See Appendix A & B). The latter asked potential participants to contact me directly if they were interested in participating.

After all the interviews had been conducted, four of the students were selected for further analysis. With respect to the other three students, one participant withdrew from the research after the first interview, and the other two participants didn’t give enough information related to their personal experiences in Toronto. During the interviews with the other two students, they avoided talking about their own experiences and didn’t give much information that could contribute to the research.

The four students provided this research with rich and abundant and data. Each of them was interviewed two to three times over three to four months, and the average of the total time they contributed to this research is four hours. The students had different sets of multicultural experiences. When the four students started the interview process, one student was in his first half year in Toronto, one was in the middle of his study in a Ph.D. program, one had just graduated from school and was in the process of a job search, and the last one had started her first full-time job. Their different academic backgrounds also help to diversify the data collected in this study. One of the two students who were still continuing their studies at school was from the Department of East Asian Studies, while another one was from Mechanical Engineering. For the two students who
already graduated, one was from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and one was from the department of Materials Science and Engineering.

4.4 Data Collection

To explore the three main purposes of this research, there are three primary questions to guide the interview:

First, what factors contribute to forming beneficial multicultural experiences or increasing the difficulties related to multicultural experiences;

Second, how, with the accumulation of their multicultural experiences, the influence of these factors changes;

Lastly, how the international students perceive the changing influence of the factors and what contributes to these changes.

Data was collected through a series of interviews. Each student was interviewed for two to three times over three months. The length of interview varied according to the change of topics or the time allowed by the students. Questions during the interviews were open-ended and based on the primary questions. However, new themes emerging during the interviews were also included for the next interview. Having individual interviews take place as part of a series of interviews helps to dig more deeply into the themes emerging during each interview. Taking three months as the time period for this series of interviews is meaningful in the sense that it gathers data related to the accumulation of multicultural experiences of individuals. I guided the interviews with a couple of open-ended questions based on the three primary questions.
(See Appendix C). The interviews were audiotaped after gaining consent from participants. Note taking was used as an alternative way if the participants declined to be audiotaped.

4.5 Thematic Analysis and Chronological Method

A combination of thematic analysis and the chronological method was used to analyze the data.

Thematic analysis is a widely used analysis method in qualitative research (Floersch, Longhofer, Kranke, & Townsend, 2010; Guest, 2011; Braun, & Clarke, 2006). According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is:

1. a way of seeing;
2. a way of making sense of seemingly un-related material;
3. a way of analyzing qualitative information;
4. a way of systematically observing a person, an interaction, a group, a situation, an organization, or a culture; and,
5. a way of converting qualitative information into quantitative data (pp. 4–5)

Braun and Clarke (2006) note one of the benefits of thematic analysis is flexibility. It can be applied to a wide range of theoretical approaches as a useful and flexible research tool that enable researchers to collect rich, detailed data, and it is “not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework”. The flexibility of thematic analysis is also embodied in the variety of the information it can be applied to. As Boyatzis (1998) discussed, thematic analysis enables practitioners to examine various pieces of information systematically, which helps them interpret and understand the information more accurately and sensitively.

Besides the flexibility, unlike other analysis methods that try to seek the patterns across qualitative data, “thematic analysis can be a method that works
both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). The significance of “themes” within a study is not determined by the frequency with which they appear in or cross the data, but by the substantive significant, which refers to the consistency of themes of the participants in the studies, and whether the theme deepens the understanding of the object of inquiry (Patton, 2002; Floersch, Longhofer, Kranke, & Townsend, 2010).

In this research, thematic analysis helps me organize the variety of narrative data into consistent themes, and the themes in turn help me to deepen my understanding of the narratives.

For the thematic analysis, interviews were transcribed immediately after the meeting with participants. Data was coded and classified into themes. Then a comparison was made among the students to see the changes happening during the accumulation of multicultural experience. In the next interview, themes were explored more deeply by asking the participants to reflect more on these themes through their life stories. New themes emerging during the interviews in the next round were analyzed in the same way. A codebook was developed to record all the themes and the contexts of the themes. The contexts include who tells the stories contributing to the emergence of the theme, what happens, when it happens, the factors involved in the story, and how the participants see the experiences.

Using the chronological method, a chronology of the participants’ experiences in Toronto was developed after all the interviews. The recorded
themes were located in the historical contexts (time and place) of the participants.

The combination of the thematic analysis and the chronological method will benefit the research in the following ways:

First, because the themes are rooted in their stories, and are discussed more than one time with participants, this process can not only help to deepen the exploration of their experiences but also provide as a check process to ensure the accuracy of the analysis.

Second, since the generation and analysis of themes are closely connected with the contextual factors of the narratives, therefore the comparison can be more comprehensive, including a broad coverage of the factors contributing to participants’ unique experiences and their understanding of the experiences.

Third, locating themes in the chronology of participants’ experiences in Toronto helps to show the changes happening with the accumulation of their multicultural experiences.

4.6 Research Positionality and Study Trustworthiness

As discussed by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), investigators acknowledge their assumptions when conducting qualitative research. I begin this process by identifying my assumptions about the multicultural experiences of Chinese graduate students. As a Chinese female graduate student who is studying in an education program at the University of Toronto, I acknowledge the potential for international students to perceive the factors influencing their multicultural
experiences differently from researchers from the host country. Also, I perceive that besides the personal factors, systemic factors existing in the current higher education system contribute to form the factors resulting in negative and positive multicultural experiences. Moreover, these factors also contribute to the changes of perspectives and expectations of the international students with the accumulation of multicultural experiences.

I used several strategies to increase study trustworthiness and monitor potential biases. First, I shared with the participants the final documents of the multicultural experience chronology with themes emerging from their life stories located within the chronology, and sent the transcripts of interviews to them so that they could comment on the accuracy and authenticity. Second, I had monthly meetings with my supervisor, who has been working as a Lecturer for years at the University of Toronto and has rich experiences interacting with international students. We reviewed analytical memos, coding procedures, and emerging themes and discussed ways to interpret data. She also challenged my potential biases in data collection and the analysis process. Third, I also used disconfirming evidence to monitor potential biases. I included and analyzed the data contradicting emerging themes and challenging my way of interpretation, and asked the participants for examples of this kind of data.

4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, to explore the unique and valuable insights provided by international students, the study is based on the narratives collected from
interviews guided by several open-ended questions. Counter-story telling is employed as the method to investigate the narratives and challenge the dominant ideology, liberal multiculturalism. Then an analysis based on the combination of thematic and chronological methods is used to analyze the narratives collected through the interviews.
Chapter 5

Stories of Four Students

5.1 Introduction

The participants provided abundant narratives covering a wide range of their academic and social life in Canada. Their various backgrounds made it possible to look at the themes emerging from the narratives from different perspectives, and the length of time that they spent in Canada enabled us to see how their perspectives on the impacts of the themes were developed and changed with the accumulation of multicultural experiences.

In this chapter, the narratives of four students participating in the research are organized and analyzed chronologically. First, each individual's narratives are organized to develop a chronology of their experiences in Toronto. Then by locating the themes emerging from these narratives into their chronology, the impacts and the changes, which happened with the accumulation of the students' experiences, are analyzed.

The four students were all Chinese international students at the University of Toronto, and they were all abroad for the first time. They were from different academic areas and arrived in Canada at different times.

5.2 Ted's Narrative and Analysis

5.2.1 Ted's Narrative

Ted: male, Department of East Asian Studies, arrived on 25th August, 2014
Arriving with his academic interest in studies of the rural area in China, his narratives are mainly about his academic life at University of Toronto. He talked about how University of Toronto is different from universities in China, how his research interests have been influenced by the academic environment, and other factors that have challenged or benefited his life in Toronto during three interviews over four months. The three interviews took place in the first half year that Ted was in Toronto. During the interviews, Ted talked about his experiences happening around the time of the interview, so the narratives are naturally recorded chronologically and consistent with the timeline of the interviews. Therefore, the narratives listed here are organized according to the timeline of the three interviews.

The first interview took place three months after he arrived in Toronto. He talked about the difference between University of Toronto and the university of his undergraduate study.

I had expected that the academic atmosphere would be more open and loose than in China, but I didn’t expect it is this loose. I’m surprised by this. All my study is totally based on my own academic interest, and advisors will not interfere with what I’m doing. I’m not adapted to this loose atmosphere (because) I haven’t figured out what I want to do with the topic I’m interested in, so I feel lost in this totally free academic atmosphere.

...At the very beginning, I thought I would follow the academic study of my supervisor. Then I realized it was not like that. It still depends on myself.
When discussing the pressure he felt within the classroom, he talked about how the way of teaching made him feel excluded. He felt the new teaching way was hard to accept.

I was working on the rural China topic in China with a modern perspective before I came here. Here it is using a post-modern perspective, which is a complicated, and a confusing perspective. For example, when I’m having class, I feel (it’s hard to understand their perspective, because) the teacher will not explain the post-modern perspective explicitly, even though when they are doing research, this ideology has already permeated into their research. So if you haven’t learned that, it will be really hard to keep up with them in class. You have to learn it from the beginning all by yourself. It is hard for me. I have no background in this area. It is a new way of thinking to me. It is a hard time to me. And I have talked about this with one of my colleagues. She is also from China, and she has been here for one more year than me. She said she found it was hard to accept the teachers’ way of thinking in her first year either. I talked with the other domestic colleagues don’t feel in this way. They all have received training in this area (thinking in a post-modern way). I’m the one having the least knowledge and experience here. So I read as many materials as I can to adapt...

He said he felt he was forced to accept the way of thinking rooted in western culture when doing his study here, which put him in an inferior position when doing his study here.
I didn’t feel my Chinese cultural background can help me nothing with my study here… They’re using western thinking to analyze China, where we (scholars in China) are using a different way of thinking. I can’t change them. It is a process they change me with their western way of thinking. I have to change myself to fit in their way of thinking. Or you can criticize while fitting in. But it is impossible that you will change them… or at least for me.

...I feel maybe we can change ...Maybe it can be changed? After all it is East Asian Studies Department. But I can’t feel it now. They are just regarding China as an object of inquiry they study with the western approach, an “other thing” they study with their way of thinking... Even though there are students from a variety of culture, they all transform their study to the northwestern way. It’s the thinking way dominates the academia here. For example, most students here are Canadians with South Korean background, but they grew up here, and naturally they use a western way to think. For other students studying here as international students, they may disagree with it at the beginning, but eventually and gradually they will accept it.

...I felt the Chinese thinking way is... how to say... less “advanced”. I felt I’m always following the Western way of thinking while I talk with them. You have no way. You have to use their way to prove your perspective (is right). I began to have this feeling after I came here. You have to admit that within this globalized background (in academia), when you are from a less “advanced” culture, you have to accept the “advanced” way of thinking.
He described his class experience as “very painful”, not only because of the difficulty in adjusting to the western way of thinking while doing research, but also because of the language barrier.

...... Besides the way of teaching, language is also a difficulty. After all it is an English emersion environment, no matter how good your English is when in China, it is a totally different environment... especially when you want to express yourself. Like at M.A. seminar, how to express and how to listen, these two are the things I suffer a lot from. Sometimes the teacher speaks so fast that I can’t follow him, especially when I haven’t adjusted to their way of thinking.

When asked how he dealt with these problems, he said he had to deal with them mostly by himself.

The only support from school I got that is aimed at as a new graduate student is after the orientation, our coordinator gave us the instruction on how to choose and sign up courses one by one. After that I didn't receive any support like that.... Everyone is very independent. No one will come to you to give you help unless you turn to others. As for international and domestic students, I don’t think there is any different treatment. Everyone is the same. At first I thought it was unfair for the international students who just arrive here. They won’t offer their help if you don’t come to them, but being from another culture, I don’t know how to ask for help. I felt embarrassed and rude.

...When I first came here, I never came to my supervisor to ask for help because I didn’t know we should do that. I thought it was like in China, where
you follow the study topic with your supervisor, and your supervisor will give you instructions. But here supervisor will never come to you. You won't receive any help if you don't come to them. It is until recently that my undergrads university in China invited me to write an article introducing the supervisor here, I had the opportunity to talk with him about the problem I’m facing now.

*However, when he talked about his life outside school here, he said he didn’t feel there was much change in his lifestyle because of the diversity of culture existing here.*

I feel there is no change in my lifestyle (laugh). Actually I feel that there is no need (to integrate)... After all Canada is a multicultural country. Unlike in the U.S. you have to integrate into their culture. Here you can have the community of your own culture. Having no the eager to integrate, I still have a good life here. It’s not like the U.S. In America if you don’t fit into their culture, you become a member of the minority groups. Here I don’t feel this way. There is no difference between minority and majority. I feel it’s equal. This is based on what my friends in the U.S. told me.

*He also talked about how limited he felt when he wanted to interact with people from different cultures.*

The people I know from here are mostly because we share the same office or in the same class. When it is outside school, I don’t feel the need to join in the local people’s community, nor will they volunteer to know more about me. The most time I spend with people from other cultures is at the M.A. room, our office.
...When I first came here, I had the expectation of meeting people from other cultures. I wanted to know them, and to know the life here. But after a while, I found it was energy-consuming. I don’t have the time. The academic pressure already took a large part of my life. And I don’t feel it (making new friends) helpful.

...The ways I get to know people are very limited, I feel. And people here are more independent. It’s hard to build a more stable relationship.

*I interviewed him one month later, at the end his first semester at the University of Toronto. We continued the topic of academic life at university. He showed more confidence this time and talked about the progress he had made through the first term.*

My courses of this term are almost finished now. I gave a presentation in one of the classes, which is about the framework for my research paper. My supervisor said the framework is clear and logical... I felt encouraged. I felt my reading skills are getting improved, too. After the all the readings for my final paper, I feel I’m prepared for my study here. My horizon has been broadened and I’ve started to view things through different lenses. I didn’t feel this way before.

...I feel I have made some progress. When I first came here, I was always following other people, choosing the courses other people choose. I remember that at the beginning of this term, I wanted to attend an economic class. I went to talk with the professor of this class but my English was so poor that I could barely express myself. I felt the professor looked at me like I was a weirdo, and
finally he suggested me to attend the class for undergraduate students first. Now I’m changing. I feel I can manage things like that.

*Despite the progress he had made, he still expressed worry about his English proficiency. He felt he didn’t have much chance to practice his oral English, and always felt embarrassed when he spoke in class.*

I still think language is a major problem, especially oral English, the way in which you express yourself. Reading and writing in English are not that hard for me. I get many opportunities to practice through reading articles and working on my papers. But I don’t have that much chance to practice oral English... It’s not you have nothing to say, but you lack practice to express myself in English. The majority of friends are Chinese, and I don’t have that much chance to talk about my idea in English.

...I will participate in big group discussion in the seminar class, but I don’t speak that much because it's hard (to follow and express my opinions). When I first came here I was excited about sharing my perspectives in class. After all I was that kind of active student back in China. Here when I saw other students sharing their perspectives freely in class, I wanted to do that, too. But when I tried to talk, I spoke very slowly. I need to organize my opinion in English. I felt I slowed down the pace of the whole class, so I lost the confidence to speak in class. Then it was until my turn to give feedback on readings in class- there will be students giving short presentation about the reading for this week at the beginning of the class- I spent much more time to prepare than the domestic
students, and I could only speak a little bit more fluently with all the efforts I've done.

...It is also embarrassing. When I'm speaking, the other classmates will look at me with a confused look, like asking me “what are you talking about? We can’t understand.”

...It's also stressful that I have the feeling I’m representing my country, I don’t want to embarrass my country.

*Even though still faced with the language barrier, this time he talked about the influence of two professors. In his opinion, the two professors gave him support in different ways, but their helped him a great deal.*

The professors they don't judge me on my language proficiency. They show understanding, and encourage me to speak more, and practice more. For example (the professor of the seminar course), when I'm not speaking, Professor Meng will specifically say that she wants me to express my idea. Even sometimes when I really have nothing to say after everyone else shares ideas, She will say, “Ted, you must express your idea. We won’t continue until you share your idea.” ... I feel what she does is beneficial to me. It helps when someone pushes you. You won’t start your first step until someone pushes you. But in other classes, the other teachers will assume that your English language proficiency is as good as the domestic students. I lose the opportunity to speak. But in this one, because the professor is pushing me all the time, I must be more prepared, and I will have as much opportunity to speak as the domestic students... For me it is a
beneficial experience. I can’t say it is an enjoyable experience, because when I’m in class, feeling unconfident and embarrassed, it’s a terrible experience... She also criticizes my paper strictly. It is really a blow to me especially after I have made so much effort.

In another class, Professor Shen is a venerable senior. He will respect your ideas. He doesn’t think it is necessary that you have to speak English as fluent as native speakers. He thinks that what really matters is your idea. As long as you can express your idea, the real content, clearly, it is fine. But even though he doesn’t care, I still have stress (because I want to express my ideas better). He encourages me to express more, through which I will feel the need to practice myself.

I think both of the ways are beneficial to me. But absolutely I feel more comfortable with the way of Professor Shen. And sometimes he will praise me, which makes me feel confident and good about myself.

In the last interview, the unsolved problem of how to deal with the differences between Chinese and western mindsets continued to plague him and made him feel lost.

I can’t see the reason why I have to study this topic (rural area in China) here. All the other students in the class are more eligible and I have to speak English. I feel stressful and begin to question myself that why I have to bear such pressure. Is what I’m studying now meaningful? What I’m studying now is so different
from the reality in China that I feel uncertain what contribution I can make in the future in this area.

If I were in China now, I would continue to apply for a Ph.D. program, or to apply to be a civil servant. Now I'm questioning the meaning of earning a Master's degree abroad, because everything I've learned here is to criticize what I've learned in China. I feel lost and have no idea what to do next. What I've learned here is so different from that in China.

...I feel the way they analyze the problem in Chinese rural area is useful and it makes sense, but the solution they come up with is impractical. I feel my way of solution is not satisfying. But I can't accept the way here either.

...I can't find anyone who shares the same perspective with me in this area here. They are all pursuing their studies with the western post-modern perspective.

He felt this feeling of uncertainty and loss might be the result of his inability to adjust to the western academic and social environment.

I think it may be because of the environment here. You have too many options here to make up your mind to make a decision. In China I would never think that much things. It is like a linear life path in China. I will find a job in government or in a company after graduation. I won’t think about the meaning of what I am doing. But here is different. Here is multidimensional, and you need to be independent. You have to find your own ground to stand on in this society,
and to find the meaning of your existence in the society. I feel it’s hard to adjust when you are under the shock of experiencing these differences.

*When he talked about social adjustment to life outside school, he said he felt it was unnecessary to integrate.*

...Here I feel empty without a plan for future. I don’t feel much pressure (to fit in). On the other hand, I find it is hard to integrate into the culture here no matter how good your English is. So I think it is unnecessary to integrate. But I know it is important to integrate in, especially for what I’m studying now. I should have known more about their way of conducting the studies.

### 5.2.2 Analysis of Ted’s Narratives

The three interviews with Ted took place over four months. The narratives collected in these interviews cover topics from the difficulties related to language to the uncertainty he felt about his future study. Analyzed chronologically, four themes emerged from these narratives: language barrier related to English proficiency and cultural differences, way of teaching, seeking support and social adjustment.

Analyzed chronologically, the themes that appeared immediately in the first two months he came here are language barriers and way of teaching in class. In his first three months, language barriers were more related to English proficiency like in the story he told about choosing courses. He found it hard to communicate with professors and had to give up the course he wanted to attend. However, with the accumulation of his experiences, the language barriers he met
shifted to cultural differences. Combined with the difficulties in adjusting to the style of teaching in class, which is highly western-centered, he felt excluded from class. With his studies continuing at University of Toronto and his failing to combine what he had studied in China and the western-centered way of thinking, he felt lost and uncertain about whether what he studied here is practical and suitable in China, where his study topic is rooted. In his last interview, he began to question the meaning of his studies abroad.

Seeking support is another constant theme. In his first two months, the support he received was very limited, and because of the “loose” study environment, he finds being independent is part of the culture here. The support from school, as he reflects, doesn’t take the different situations faced by international students into consideration, which he thinks is “equal” but “unfair” for new international students. By the end of his first term, he begins to receive support from two of his professors. One of them “pushes” him to participate more in class, and another focuses more on his ideas, which gives him confidence. However, he doesn’t receive much support when he struggles between the western approach to his study and the one he has used in China. He finds almost everyone in his department employs the western way when analyzing issues rooted in East Asia. The failure to gain recognition of his perspective made him feel stressed and he found it hard to continue his study.

Even though faced with difficulties in language and adjustment to the academic environment, Ted doesn’t report much pressure related to social
adjustment or social integration. At the very beginning, the openness to cultural diversity here spares him from feeling the pressure of fit in to the local culture. However, as the interviews continue, he begins to feel it is harder and harder to accept the cultural differences reflected in the study topic he is working on. Even without the language barrier, the difficulty of adjusting culturally, and the remote distance between the Chinese realities he understands and the western-centered courses makes him feel unmotivated to integrate in socially.

1. 5.3 Zac’s Narrative and Analysis

5.3.1 Zac’s Narrative

Zac, male, arrived in Toronto in August 2012 for his Ph.D. degree in Mechanical Engineering.

Zac was interviewed twice over a three-month period for this research. The interviews took place in his third year at the University of Toronto. Zac came to Toronto directly after he graduated from his undergraduate studies in China. As he had described during the interviews, he spent the majority of his time at school doing experiments in the lab, and he didn’t have much off-campus working experiences. Therefore, most of his narratives are focused on his academic life.

Without much experience of doing lab experiments, Zac had expectations for his academic life at the University of Toronto, and as he described, most of his expectations had been satisfied.
Before I came here, I didn’t have much experiences of doing academic studies. I didn’t attend master studies before I came here, and had no idea of how studies in this area are like in North America. I was looking forward to the advanced studies abroad. I hope that my supervisor is open to different opinions and I can choose the subject I like for my Ph.D. study.

I also hope that I can meet all kinds of people, because Toronto is a diverse city.

However, despite the fact that his expectation was fulfilled, the busy schedule of his supervisor caused him some problems.

My supervisor is very flexible, which is just like what I’ve expected. He gives me great space to explore what I want to do. It is important that at the beginning you have the space to explore the direction you want to follow. He also gives me the opportunity to make decision by myself.

But I never expected my supervisor to be so busy that he doesn’t have the time to have a look at what I am doing. At the beginning this was not a problem, but later it began to influence me. ... I need someone that is the expert in this area to guide me.

Even though his professor’s busy schedule caused his some problems, he still reported the positive influence from his supervisor and the support from other professors.

My supervisor has a deep understanding of both eastern and western cultures. This helps a great deal when we communicate with each other. My
supervisor is a great example for the Chinese immigrants in Canada. He just 
received the “Outstanding Contribution Award for Chinese Immigrants in 
Canada”. He is really good at integrating Chinese and Canada cultures. He is an 
excellent example for me.

Other professors are very nice to me, too. I received much support from my 
dissertation committee members. They are always happy to give me support, 
and they are very easy to get along. I like it that I can greet them by their first 
names. I feel the relationship between us is very equal.

*Language is a major problem he met when he first started his study in Toronto.*
The biggest problem to me when I came here is language. Even though I took 
language exams before I came here, it took time to adjust to the language 
environment. I was used to thinking in Chinese, then translated what I thought in 
English. This slowed down my speaking speed. It took a few months for me to 
change.

I tried to improve my English by communicating more with my supervisor. It 
was almost impossible for me to communicate with him at the beginning. But I 
believe when being put in an embarrassing situation, I will improve more by 
pushing myself.

...When I join group discussion, I only talked about the key points. I would 
first write the key points I wanted to talk about down, and then joined in the 
group discussion. Sometimes I couldn’t participate in the discussion. No one 
would stop to wait for me. I felt very stressed at that time. I didn’t have the
chance to express my opinion. Besides there were arguing skills that I didn’t grasp that time...

I had talked about what I was feeling in the group. I said, “I feel embarrassed. I’m sorry for my poor English.” I said that because I hoped they could understand it was not because I had nothing to share that I was not participating, it was because I has language barrier. But they wouldn’t remember that. Especially when we were talking a topic everyone was familiar with. Everyone wanted to join, and they would forgot (that there was a group member who had a language barrier).

*He said that the assumption about his language proficiency made it harder to overcome the language barrier. He talked about his experiences of attending a students’ club, and his experiences of attending group discussions.*

I attended some club for bachelor students. They didn’t know my background. They thought that since I was doing the Ph.D. and I was older than them so I must understand them. So they talked with me very fast with all the slangs that I even don’t understand now. But they thought I could speak English as well as they did.

... In our department, when we discuss, we will talk about many technical details. I learnt the terms used to describe these details in China, but I’m unfamiliar with the English ones. They will assume that since you’re a Ph.D. student, you must know how to say that, so they’ll keep talking...Actually later I found that these were all very simple words I’ve already learnt in China.
...I think this problem (English terminologies) can be solved easily. Drawing an illustrative graph, or explaining a bit to international students can all be good solutions, and it won't take much time. But they won't because they assume you already know these words.

_However, after struggling with language for few months, he began to get used to the English language environment. The recognition of his achievement of his study is a great encouragement for him._

Working in a lab there is not much chance to talk with other people. It doesn’t matter where you’re from, what language you are speaking, as long as you’re able to share your idea in group talking and able to get good result from the project you’re working on...

...I started doing teaching assistant from September last year. I help the bachelor students do their project and I will help to resolve some problems they have on their project. Usually I know how to help them, and they think I’m knowledgeable in this area. I meet many people through this job. I get along with the students well. This is a very positive experience to me.

_His experience of struggling with language also made him have compassion for the other international students who were faced with a language barrier._

Later when I attended group discussion with other new international students who may face language problem, I will pay attention to them, wait for their ideas and give them more opportunity to participate in.
The focus on one’s achievement instead of one’s cultural background, large population of international students and development of Chinese community help to reduce the pressure he may experience because of cultural differences and the stress from having a language barrier.

I still need to improve my language. I feel it is a lifelong process to improve English language ability, but I’m not worried about that. I find that for people working in the area of technology and engineering, as long as you have good professional knowledge and skills, you will have a promising career, because knowledge in this area is universal all over the world. In my department, the academic performances of students are evaluated equally with the same standard. I feel this is very good. When assessing one’s achievement, the result should not be influenced by personal reasons.

…I don’t have much pressure to adjust culturally here. For us Ph.D. students, we spend most time in the lab. Sometimes I even don’t have to talk to people, so I don’t think I have to communicate with people from here to know and integrate into their culture. I feel it is better this way. You are communicating with them because you all work on something meaningful and practical. I feel I can integrate better with people from other cultural backgrounds in this way. Take our group project as an example. We have group members from all over the world, and we gather together to work on the same project. We communicate and get to know each other because of collaboration.
...When we work on the same project together, it doesn’t matter where you’re from and what your skin color is. The thing really matter is the contribution you make to the group.

... I feel the atmosphere at the University of Toronto is good for international students. Here you don’t feel the gap between international and domestic students... Having many international students as my colleagues in my department is very important to me. It would be a huge pressure for me if there were obvious difference between majority and minority people, and there was discrimination between these two groups.

...In my daily life, Chinese community takes most of my time. I don’t feel the differences between different groups when I’m working, but in my daily life, I feel much closer with people from the same cultural background with me.

**Zac also described the change of his perspective on his future plan because of the open and free atmosphere in Toronto. He also reported the problems he was facing when he talked about his future plan.**

I want to apply to graduate early. I don’t want to find a job and work for other people, and have a scheduled life. I want to work for myself. I feel this career expectation is much easier to fulfill in Toronto than in the cities I have been to in China. I have stayed in Beijing, Shanghai and Harbin before. Especially in Harbin, people there are more conservative. But here as long as you have the courage to think and to practice, it is possible that I can fulfill my career plan.
...But the thing is that, compared to America, universities in Canada gives less financial support to graduate students. I hope I can get more support from school.

In addition to limited financial support from school, he also talked about other financial problems he is faced with as an international student at the University of Toronto.

...I feel it is unfair that international students are paying much more tuition than domestic students. I feel one time or one and half times more than domestic students is acceptable. But now it is two or even more than two times more tuition than domestic students. And it is still increasing every year. It is much pressure. For Ph.D. students, their supervisors have to cover the tuition, which means the cost of enrolling an international student is much higher than that of a domestic student.

The additional scholarship international student can apply for is also limited. Most time when I want to apply a scholarship that is for students who do well on their studies, I find that it is limited to domestic students or students holding Permanent Residence card.

Even when the scholarship application is open to all the students, the number of international students that are offered with the scholarship will be much more limited than domestic students. I feel this is very unfair.

5.3.2 Analysis of Zac’s Narratives
The two interviews with Zac took place over three months in his third year of study in a Ph.D. program at the University of Toronto. Four themes emerged from his narratives: language barriers, the recognition of his academic performance, the open and free atmosphere in his department, and the support from school.

Zac experienced a language barrier in his first few months in Toronto. He had difficulty in participating and understanding the terminologies used in group discussions. He thought that the assumption that he had the same level of language proficiency as other domestic students made it harder for him to overcome the language barrier. However, the emphasis on and the recognition of his academic performance helped him gain confidence, and reduced the pressure he felt from his language barrier.

The recognition of his academic performances also helped to reduce the pressure he may have felt from cultural differences. He felt the emphasis on academic performance made cultural background less important when he participated in group work, and he felt he could integrate with other group members better in this way.

The open and free environment in his department influenced his multicultural experiences in two ways. On the one hand, the free environment gave him more space to explore what he wanted to do, and increased his confidence in fulfilling his career plan. On the other hand, he had less
opportunity to get support from his supervisor, and had to deal with the academic pressure by himself.

For the support he received from school, he mainly talked about the financial support. He felt that there was limited financial support for students to start their own career. In addition to the increasing tuition, international students, are also faced with the situation where there were fewer resources for them than for domestic students.

**5.4 Donna’s Narrative and Analysis**

**5.4.1 Donna’s Narrative**

Donna, female, Ontario Institute for studies in Education, arrived in August, 2012

Donna has been in Toronto for over 2 years. She had graduated with a Master of Education degree six months before she began participating in this research,. After working in several part-time jobs, she finally found a full-time job at an educational organization established by a Chinese Canadian in Toronto. Due to her busy schedule, I only had the chance to interview her two times within three months. The first interview took place when she had just found her new full-time and the second interview took place two months later. To ensure that the quantity of data I collected from her is consistent with the other participants, she agreed to spend one to two hours for each interview. In this part, her narratives during the two interviews are reorganized chronologically.
Most of Donna’s narratives are about her experience of job hunting. When asked about her first couple months in Toronto as an international student, she talked about her experiences of attending classes.

At the beginning, I seldom participated in class discussion and activities. I feel hard to integrate into the class because I’m so unfamiliar with the topics talked in class that I don’t know how I should participate in. I can feel the atmosphere in class is open, and the teachers always encourage questions, but I don’t know how to join in them. It was like building an atomic bomb. No matter how the other people tell you how easy it is to assemble it, if no one ever tell you what an atomic bomb is and what is each part of the bomb, you will never do it as well as the people who know that. To me as an international student I’m like the one who know nothing about the bomb, and all the domestic students in the class are familiar with the topics, the educational system and the way of teaching. I feel hard to compete with the domestic students.

...I feel isolated in the class because of my lack of knowledge of the educational system here. I have made a great of effort to adjust in.

...Most of my friends are Chinese. I used to make friends with other international students and some Canada born Chinese when I lived on campus in the Graduate House before I graduated. I made friends with my roommates, but it didn’t last long. They moved out after a while. I also met some people when attending the activities held by the Graduate House. But I felt the relationship with Canadian people is not as close as with Chinese people.
As for the difficulties she encountered while trying to adjust to the life here, she didn’t think they were directly related to language. She said the difficulties she experienced were mostly because of cultural differences.

I majored in English, and I was an English teacher when I was in China, so I hadn’t experienced very serious language problems. But I did find cultural differences a major problem when I was at OISE. For example, in a children literacy course, when the domestic students talked about the fairy tales, nursery rhymes and other background stories that are very common in Canada, I can’t follow them because they are very different from China, and these are things they won’t explain to you in class.

...The education system is also very different from that in China, but there are no courses offered to help them fit in. I was in the Master of Education program, and I wanted to find a job in the educational area, so I made a lot effort to know more about the system here myself. I talked with classmates who have working experiences, and worked as volunteer in the educational institutions here. I used to volunteer in a private high school here.

During her process of adjustment, she mostly sought support from friends and peers who had been here for a longer time; for the services offered by the school, she had a passive attitude.

I learned much from Tracy (one of her friends). She came here one year before me. She gave me many advices on my study and life here.
... I attended the Chinese Student Union at University of Toronto, and also some other Chinese students’ clubs. It is a good way for me to meet people and make friends. It is through these Chinese students I began to know more about the resources on campus.

...But I didn’t get much support from school. There is no transition support at OISE, and I didn’t receive much information of the transition help from the university. I think it would be easier for me to adjust if I could get some transition help when I first came here.

...I used the editing services from writing center before. I remember it was at the end of the first term that I had to finish a very difficult assignment, writing a critical review. I didn’t know how to write “critical review” at that time, and I was not sure whether I had written the essay in the proper way. The writing center gave me very good service on editing my paper, but they didn’t offer service on the paper structure or instruction on how to write different kinds of paper. I feel the staffs working in the writing center are not clear about what international students really need and the difficulties these students are meeting. The services they offer are same to international and domestic students.

For her life outside school, she didn’t experience much problem. She managed to find various volunteer and part-time jobs in the Chinese community before she graduated from school, and as she described, she never felt “disadvantaged”.

I haven’t experienced much problem when I worked outside school. I first worked as a volunteer helping new immigrants settle down in Toronto. I saw
many new immigrants who used to have very good job can’t find a job compatible to their ability. Then I volunteered in an after school program, where I helped the children of new immigrants adjust to the life here. The children were experiencing hard time when they first arrived. They didn’t play with others because of the language barrier. These are all volunteer jobs in Chinese community. I’ve also volunteered in a private high school run by a Chinese company.

...I didn’t feel I was disadvantaged when I volunteered in these organizations. I worked in the Chinese community, and this is a big community with many Chinese people. I never felt I was in a minority group.

When she graduated from school, she began to feel the pressure of finding a job. Her unfamiliarity with the educational system in Toronto also caused problem in her program choice when she applied for graduate school in Toronto.

When I first came here, I was thinking about becoming a teacher in a public school. Then I realized it wouldn’t happen. I thought holding a Master degree from OISE could qualify me to be a teacher, but after I received the offer and came here I found it didn’t work that way. I have to have a teacher certification. I have to go back to a college and spend another two years to get the certificate, which is a not a short time and a high cost, especially when I have to attend school as an international student again.

She also talked about the difficulties she met as a “foreigner” and the limited support she received from school.
... Even though I decide to go back to a college and get a teacher certificate, I don’t think I’m able to get a job as a full-time teacher. The position is very competitive, and there are many white people with teacher certificate but still can’t find a job in public schools. It is hard to compete with the white people. Language is the first problem. It is impossible to speak English as well as a native. Even though after years of practice that your language is not a problem any more, you still have an Asian face. My working experiences before twenty are all in China.

...Most of the job positions emphasize “Canadian” experience, and the employers hope their employees are “native English speakers”, and are Permanent Residents in Canada or Canadians.

...I tried to seek help from the university. I attended some workshops. They helped me editing the resumes and cover letters, but besides that they didn’t give much practical advices. They only talked about the things that are superficial like you need to talk to people, ask them to write reference letters and so on. It didn’t help a lot. I relied mostly on myself to find a job, and I seldom receive efficient help from people outside Chinese community.

In the second interview, when she had been working full time in the Chinese educational organization for three months, and tried to find better job opportunities, she talked about the problems she was faced with.

Now I feel lost about my career path. I don’t feel the future of the company is very promising. Last month the company failed two business programs.
I have been working in the Chinese community since I came here. I don’t feel the working experiences are different from China. But I want to find a job outside the Chinese community.

...I feel on the one hand, Chinese community gives me much support and makes me feel secure. Because of the development of the Chinese community here, I don’t feel I’m from a minority group. But on the other hand, through my experiences of finding job, I find the job opportunity is very limited in the Chinese community. The job positions offer less benefit than the job positions from the western company.

...It is not easy for me to change a job now. I’m not a permanent residence, but I have applied for it. I’m still waiting for the result. Changing job in this period will influence the PR application, because when I applied I submitted what I’m doing now as my full-time job. I’m worried they will check whether I’m still working when they work on my application. They want you to have a full-time job here.

*Even though in a hard time now, she still thinks Toronto is a better place for international students compared to other North American cities.*

...I think Toronto is a better place, compared to other North American cities. Chinese communities in other cities are more disadvantaged than those in Toronto. The Chinese community here is more developed with a large Chinese population. Besides Toronto itself is an immigrant city, and the immigrants are on the equal footing.
...But it is different in the U.S. My friends in the U.S. tell me it is very different from here. Sometime they will be the only Chinese people at the workplace. But here I work in the Chinese company, and all my colleagues are Chinese. I feel it is just like in China.

5.4.2 Analysis of Donna’s Narratives

The two interviews with Donna took place over three months. Her narratives cover four main themes: seeking support, cultural differences, the role of Chinese community in her life in Toronto, and the problem related to legal identity.

When locating these themes in her chronology of experiences in Toronto, we can see the changes of the factors influencing her experiences.

She encountered cultural differences immediately when she started her study at OISE. In class, she found that it was hard to get engaged with the topics discussed, and her unfamiliarity with the different educational system in Toronto added stress to her study. Outside class, cultural differences also made it harder for her to develop strong interpersonal relationships with people from other countries. In addition, because of the lack of information about the differences between Chinese and Canadian educational system, she failed to apply to the Master program she wanted. The failure to get the degree she wanted also caused problems in her career plan. She also felt uncertain about becoming a teacher in Toronto, because of the cultural differences she had experienced. However, with her life here getting more and more involved with the Chinese community in Toronto, she began to experience fewer cultural
difference. After she found a job in a Chinese company, she described her work experience as “just like in China”.

Seeking support is another theme emerging from her narratives. Even though she had received help from the services and workshops offered by the school, she felt the effect of these services was very limited. To her, the services were either seldom aimed at international students, or failed to meet the specific needs of international students. Before she graduated from OISE, she received some academic support. But as she described, the support seemed superficial and didn’t help much to improve her adjustment experience. After she graduated from OISE, she received little support from school. In this situation, her sources of support were mostly found in the Chinese community. She had sought help and support from other Chinese students, Chinese student club, and people she met from the Chinese community.

Donna’s experiences in Toronto are closely involved with the Chinese community. When she first came here, it was through the Chinese community that she began to get to know and adjust to the life in Toronto. To become familiar with the educational system, she had worked and volunteered in educational institutions in the Chinese community. This experience encouraged her a lot. She never felt “disadvantaged” because of the development and large scale of the Chinese community in Toronto. Her first job was also in a Chinese company. However, during her job-hunting process, she began to find the gap between the Chinese community and the mainstream Canadian society. After
working in the company for two months, when she wanted to seek better job opportunities, she began to have a mixed feeling about the Chinese community. On the one hand, she felt secure staying in this community; on the other hand, she felt the opportunity in this community was limited, but it was hard for her to find a job outside the Chinese community.

The theme of the problem related to legal identity emerged when she tried to find a job and settled down in Toronto after graduating. The high cost of attending college to get a teaching certificate as an international student made her plan to be a teacher impossible. After graduating, she found many companies preferred employees holding Canadian citizenship. Her identity as a “foreigner” in Toronto not only limited her job choices, it was also an impediment when she tried to seek other job opportunities. She had to stay in her current job even when she felt the company’s future was not promising because staying in a full-time job would help her to gain more advantage when applying for Permanent Residence identity.

5.5 Aron’s Narrative and Analysis

5.5.1 Aron’s Narrative

Aron, male, arrived in Toronto in August 2012 for his Ph. Degree in Materials Science and Engineering. He transferred to the Masters Degree of Materials Science and Engineering later.

Aron had been in Canada for 4 years when the interviews took place. Before he became a graduate student at the University of Toronto, he was in a Masters
program at the University of Western Ontario. He applied for a Ph.D. program at the University of Toronto and got accepted, but he transferred to a Masters degree after being in the Ph.D. program for one year. We had three interviews within the first four months after he graduated from the University of Toronto, when he was trying to find a full-time job. In these three interviews, he mainly talked about his social and academic life in Toronto.

_In the first interview, when he had just graduated from school the previous week, he mainly talked about his school life at the University of Toronto, and how people around him had changed his life plan._

I pictured my life in a different way since I came here. Before I came here, I was planning to get a master degree, and get achievement in academia. My focus was on study, because I thought that to fulfill my expectation of future life, only a bachelor degree might not be enough. I though having a degree from a graduate school in North America helped to show my success in academic studies. So I applied for the Ph.D. program at the University of Toronto after I got my master degree. But I found it is different from what I had been thinking. I have more options here, and I have gained much more skills and abilities through my four-year study here. I felt besides staying in academia, I have other options.

...The free and open atmospheres in the engineering department and people around me, who have been here for a long time, and who are very successful, have influenced me a lot. My supervisor is from China. There are five professors and lecturers from China in my department. Through the daily communication
with them I realized that I used to plan my future life in an unthoughtful way. I used to think the only thing I need to take care of is to study as hard as I can. I never thought there are other options for me, and there are more things I need to do and I’m able to do. Then I began to think only gaining a Ph.D. degree and publishing papers would not be enough to help me fulfill my life goal.

...I have studied in and worked for four labs. I have been interacted closely with a dozen of people. I met all kinds of people, and they are living the lives they want. Their choices of lifestyles are according to their own will and are seldom forced on to them by others. I feel that I’m able to do that, too. There is no limit for me.

_The success of other Chinese people he met not only changed his perspective on his life plan, but also helped him develop a positive attitude towards the pressure he met from cultural differences and finding a job._

...When I first came in Canada, I felt much pressure. But I don’t think the pressure was from my being a Chinese. The pressure came from the transition from an undergraduate student to a graduate student. My supervisors at Western University and University of Toronto are Chinese and Philippine. They’re all famous, successful tenured professors in Canada. Their achievement makes believe that if I work hard, I can also do well in the future.

...Recently I’m trying to find a job. I’m more tended to look at the pressure from finding a job and the pressure from cultural differences respectively. To me, job-hunting itself is a stressful process. I don't think the domestic students are
faced with less stress than international students. I have seen successful Chinese entrepreneurs and employers working in big companies giving speeches at job fairs held at school. Especially in Toronto, in the area of engineering, there are many young Chinese elites who have gained great achievement at a very young age. So I think I can’t blame the failure to find a job on my Chinese identity. If I can’t find a job, it must be my own fault.

_Besides the successful examples set by the Chinese people, the fact that Canada is an immigrant country has also helped to decrease the pressure._

...At the very beginning, I had concerned about the cultural differences. I might experience hard time because I’m a Chinese. But when I was here I found Canada itself is an immigrant country. A large number of people here have an immigrant background. We’re all alike. So I think there is nothing I should feel bad about being a foreigner here.

...For integration, I don’t feel I have problem. I didn’t experiences of not getting along with people at the lab, workplace or the club I’m in (because of cultural differences)...

...In my private life, most of my friends are Chinese people. I think it is because we share more same interests. For people from other cultural backgrounds, I feel good hanging out with them once a while. But it is hard to integrate in private, daily life. I feel good this way. To me, I feel close to Chinese people.
He also said that he didn’t think language was a serious problem for him. He also tried hard to fit in the western culture. Although he met some writing problem when he first came in Canada, which he overcame through constant exercise and the help from his supervisor.

I felt the language barrier is not a serious problem to me. I don’t think I can’t communicate with people in English and the other people will not regard me as an “outsider” either. On the other side, I try my best to participate in. I try my best to switch to the western thinking and culture. I don’t feel that “you’re treated differently because you’re from other place.”

...I think for graduate students, writing is the problem that is most difficult to overcome. I felt painful the first time I wrote paper after I came here, and I didn’t write well. But my supervisor was very nice. He helped me edit it carefully, and gave me detailed and clear advices. My writing got better after a long time. He also helped to edit my master thesis, which was very time-consuming. After I edited the thesis according to his advice, he would read and improve it again. I think he understood that the new international students might have problem in writing. He also gave me much information of resources that could help me improve my writing.

In both his first and second interviews, he talked about how he had benefited significantly from the resources and opportunity offered by school and the support from his supervisor, and these experiences continue to benefit him after he graduated and tried to find a job.
...I have experience in business when I was at the University of Toronto. I opened a small business in the material area. There was an enterprising training that encouraged students to commercialize the products of their labs. One of my Chinese colleagues took the product from his office. We joined the training and applied for the enterprising funding. It was not a big sum, but the experience was precious... We ran it for about one year. We did marketing research, made a business plan, received some order, and we even opened a website distribution. But when my friend and I graduated from school, we stopped the business because we needed a job to support our lives after graduation. The small business was not enough to support our life.

...I got much support from my supervisor. He was very supportive for this idea. He gave us many advices like finding a lab for us, help us contact people and how to conduct market research.

...Now I felt I learnt so much from this. I improved many skills like communicating and presenting. When I’m looking for a job, I find people are very interested in this experience.

...It is a rare opportunity. First you need to have a real technology, and you need the data support from the lab. Secondly your technology needs to be commercializable. And then you need to set up the team. And last you need to have a space. These are all important.
Besides the support he received from his supervisor, he also talked about the services offered by the school. However, not all the experiences of getting support from school were satisfactory.

...I have attended many presentation and writing classes held by the English speaking and writing center. But I found one problem of the language programs at the University of Toronto is that the teachers are all native English speakers. Sometimes I feel they can't get to the points that the international students really want to know. They are teaching according to their understanding of learning English. I feel their ideas are good. They try to tell the students how to do presentation, or how to deal with nervous feeling when speaking in public. But these are all for the problems that the native English speakers may meet. They just carry the same thing onto the international students, who are facing a different situation.

...I have attended classes held by the writing center. I learned some skills of overcoming nervousness, how to organize the structure, and how to develop a clear, straightforward presentation. But the reason why I attended these classes are not for these skills. The problem I'm facing is how to improve my English to overcome the nervousness led by my unconfidence in the language, how I can improve my English until I can speak as influent as a native English speaker.

Despite the fact that he was not satisfied with all the services offered by school, he did get recognition from the other people when he joined the workshops and
classes. To him, the recognition gained from his peers was more important than what these workshops could offer.

One experience is very important to me when I am finding job. I went to a job workshop held by the career center by the school. It is a very basic workshop teaching you how to write resume, cover letter, search for jobs, create and update your linkedin account, and how to talk to people and apply or the job you want. These are the six topics. I attended each of them.

I feel that first this series of workshops gave me a general idea of how to find a job in Toronto. And then I think the more important thing is that I have the opportunity to talk with people. I learned techniques of how to communicate with people, but most important, I found that no matter where you are from, no matter you’re Canadian or not, no matter what your language level is, we all face some same problems when we try to find a job. I also found that compare to other peers, my experience of doing research, running business, and other abilities have given me advantages in finding job.

... At the very beginning I felt a little nervous. Then I found I actually know many stuff related to finding jobs during the communication with other people. When we became familiar with each other, there was a domestic student ask me to help him edit his resume. I felt I was actually better than I thought before.

...I got recognition from other peers in this environment. I felt confident and this encouraged me to do better.
He was open to a broad area of job positions because of his rich experience at school.

I face to two main areas when I'm finding job. One is technology, like energy, engineering and so on. And other one is business because I also have experiences in this area.

In his second and third interview, he talked about his experiences of finding jobs. He talked about his part-time job and what he had learned from his job – hunting experience. He also talked about how he continued to get support from school.

Recently I'm busy with applying jobs, sending emails, keeping contact with people. I'm confident with finding job. Now I'm working part time as a tutor, teaching English. I can get some income from this job. I received two offers from small companies, but I'm not satisfied with these offers. The jobs are not promising.

...Tutoring is not a hard job. I work around 10 hours every week. At the beginning I only have two students, now I begin to have more students. Most of the students are Chinese. I'm also preparing for GMAT. There is a GMAT class that will open soon, and I want to teach for that class.

...This is a process during which I get to know myself. After I talked with people, I began to realize that I need to continue to build up my skills. For example I realized that my buildup in this area is not enough for me. But on the other hand, I know more clear of what is my advantage. For example, my
research ability is much better than what the labor market demands. Now I’m focusing on what I should do and waiting for opportunities.

...Before I actually began to find a job, I’m looking for engineer and business areas, and I also think about the interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary jobs. But after I talked with people I realized I took it too simple.

...Sometimes I feel overwhelmed and uneasy, and I have to find something to distract myself from these negative emotions. Besides focusing on the tutoring job, I also attend some activities at school. For example, there is a consulting program aimed at graduate students. There are 20 classes every Tuesday in this program in total.

He also talked about how he had benefited from the open atmosphere in the Canadian society and the Chinese community.

Canada is more open to different cultures. My wife used to study in the U.S., she felt in Toronto she got more opportunities to interact with different cultures. When she was in the U.S., there were less Chinese people, and the place itself was not safe. The environment in Toronto is relatively more open and free (to Chinese people). After all, the large number of Chinese people and the achievement of Chinese community to Canada are impossible to overlook. That Chinese people have made significant contribution in many important industries in Toronto is a great encouragement to the new immigrants here.

...When people first came here, they may feel lost and confused and wonder what the life is like here. Chinese community gives them an opportunity to see
how the other people's lives are like, and what they have already experienced. The newcomers will find that they have more options than they've expected.

...I haven't experienced discrimination here. To the contrary, I feel there are more advantages for Chinese people to apply jobs in Chinese companies. The base developed by the previous generations of Chinese people here offers many opportunities to the newcomers.

*Despite the fact that he didn't report many problems in finding a job as a Chinese in Toronto, he talked about the legal identity problem he has encountered.*

I felt strange that two big oil companies began to request the applicants have Permanent Residents identity. They don’t have this before. It is like something you can only meet in the U.S. In the U.S., the companies are afraid that they may have trouble if they hire employees without the American identity. They have to do the paper work for their employees to make sure the employees are legally able to work in the U.S. But now in Canada, I found some companies begin to request specifically that the applicants should be the Permanent Residents in Toronto if they’re not Canadian citizen.

But I don’t think it is a big problem. It is the same to all the foreign people in Canada. It’s not unfair.

5.5.2 Analysis of Aron’s narratives

The three interviews with Aron took place over the first four months after he graduated from the University of Toronto. The themes emerging from his narratives involved both of his experience at school and during the job hunting.
The first theme is the positive influence from the Chinese community. When he first came in Canada, he learnt from other Chinese people who had already settled in Canada how life may be like here and the options that he could have for his future life. After he graduated from school, on the one hand, the successful examples set by the previous Chinese immigrants in Toronto significantly encouraged him; on the other hand, other people’s success made him believe that he should take all the responsibility of his future in Canada. In addition, he benefitted from the growing Chinese community by finding part-time jobs within Chinese community as an English tutor, the income from which supported him after graduation. He also believed that the achievement made by the previous generation of Chinese immigrants in Toronto offered him more job opportunities.

Another theme is how the open and free atmosphere in Toronto as an immigrant city acts as a positive factor in his multicultural experience. The free lifestyles and successful careers of people immigrating to Canada from different countries showed him the various opportunities and possibilities he could have in Canada, which impacted his perspective greatly and eventually changed his life plan. The openness to diverse cultures decreased the stress from cultural differences and gave him confidence to find a job in Toronto.

The support he received from school is another constant theme he talked about. In this first year he entered in his master program at University of Toronto, he got support from both his supervisor and from school. His
supervisor helped him improve his academic writing, which was the most difficulty language problem he was faced with. However, he found the English language services offered by school couldn’t meet the actual need of international students because of their failure to understand the different language situations faced by English speaking and non-English speaking students. With his accumulation of experience as an international student at University of Toronto, he began to make use of the opportunity offered by school. With the training and funding support from school, and research and social support from his supervisor, he initiated an enterprise and ran it for a year together with his colleague, which continued to benefit him when he was looking for a job. The workshops held by school also offered him an opportunity to interact with more peers, and the recognition he gained from other peers encouraged him a great deal.

The theme related to legal identity emerged during his narratives about job-hunting experiences. According to his narratives, some job positions are not open to the international students who are not permanent residents. However, he didn’t think it was unfair, because all the immigrants were faced with the same problem. This job requirement was not aimed only at a specific group of people.

5.5 Conclusion

The narratives of the four participants reflect various aspects of their multicultural experiences in Canada. Participants shared their academic and
social life experiences during the interviews. Through the brief thematic analysis after each of the chronologically reorganized narratives, we can see there are six main themes they have discussed. These themes are: using a second language, cultural differences, seeking support, the open and free atmosphere in Canada, Chinese community, and legal identity.

Participants also shared their perspectives on the themes that had influenced their experiences. Through the chronology developed based on their narratives, we can see how their perspectives were developed and changed with the accumulation of their experiences in Canada.

In the following chapter, these themes will be further explored through comparing and examining the similarities and differences among these narratives.
Chapter 6
Voices from International Students — an Analysis of the Multicultural Experiences of International Students

6.1 Introduction

As stated throughout this study, using the narratives of participants as the empirical support for this study, the three main purposes of this research are to explore the factors influencing multicultural experiences, examine the changes in the impact of these factors over time, and study what contributes to these changes.

The factors influencing international students’ experiences emerging from the narratives collected from the four participants cover a broad range. In this chapter, the themes are classified into three main topics: using a second language, social equity and Chinese community. Under each topic, the factors classified into this topic are explored through their impacts on international students’ experiences, how the influences of these factors vary with individual and their accumulation of multicultural experiences, and the implications of these changes on the existing social framework of multiculturalism in Canada.

Through the analysis of these three topics, especially through the different perspectives of participants from various backgrounds towards the same topic, my research shows that besides the personal factors, international students are faced with pressure caused by the existing social structures and framework of multiculturalism.
6.2 Using a Second Language and International Students’ Multicultural Experience

6.2.1 The Impacts of Using a Second Language

As we can see from the narratives, all of the participants talked about problems related to language. Language barriers added pressure to their academic life and social adjustment, and for some of them, limited their job opportunities.

All of the students expressed the feeling of embarrassment talking in class in their first couple of months in Toronto. Ted, for example, felt embarrassed when talking in class because of his worries of that the other students may not understand him and he may slow down the pace of the whole class. As he stated, “It is also embarrassing. When I’m speaking, the other classmates will look at me with a confused look, like asking me ‘what are you talking about? We can’t understand.”” He also felt stressed about speaking in class because as the only Chinese student at class, he didn’t want to “embarrass” his country.

Another participant, Zac, also expressed the same feeling. He felt it was hard to participate in the class and group discussion because of his limited English proficiency and his unfamiliarity with English terminology. As he said during the interview, “In our department, when we discuss, we will talk about many technical details. I learnt the terms used to describe these details in China, but I’m unfamiliar with the English ones. They will assume that since you’re a Ph.D. student, you must know how to say that, so they'll keep talking... Actually
later I found that these were all very simple words I’ve already learnt in China, but at the very beginning I felt hard to join in discussion because I don’t know the English terminology."

Besides listening and oral English, the other two students expressed the difficulty they had in writing. Aron described paper writing as the hardest problem to solve during his study abroad. For Donna, the unfamiliarity with the paper structures used in western curriculum is the main problem she met. She told her experience of writing a “critical review”, which she had no idea how to write, but she could not get help from class or writing center, because it was commonly known among the students who were familiar with the western curriculum.

However, despite the fact that speaking a second language causes various problems, students may still benefit from it. Combined with the development of Chinese community in Toronto, being bilingual in English and Chinese benefits the international students during their job search. For example, Donna used to teach languages as her part-time and volunteer job. And for Aron, teaching English to and tutoring Chinese students was his main income resource when he graduated.

6.2.2 Changes of the Impacts of Using a Second Language

All of the participants made efforts to improve their English proficiency. However, participants told very different stories about how the impacts of language on their experiences changed.
Aron and Zac reported very positive experience. Zac said that after the first few months’ struggling with language, he began to have more confidence speaking English. To him, the recognition of the contribution he made to the lab he worked in and the recognition he gained through hard work was more important than language. As he said, “Working in a lab there is not much chance to talk with other people. It doesn’t matter where you’re from, what language you are speaking, as long as you’re able to share your idea in group talking and able to get good result from the project you’re working on…” And this experience also made him have compassion for the other international students who were faced with language barrier, “Later when I attended group discussion with other new international students who may face language problem, I will pay attention to them, wait for their ideas and give them more opportunity to participate in.”

For Aron, after he improved his English writing, he didn’t meet many language problems. Similar to Zac, he also talked about the importance of gaining recognition from people around him. As for the experience of attending workshop he noted during the interview, “I think the more important thing is that I have the opportunity to talk with people. I learned techniques of how to communicate with people, but most important, I found that no matter where you are from, no matter you’re Canadian or nor, no matter what your language level is, we all face some same problems when we try to find a job… At the very beginning I felt a little nervous. Then I found I actually know many stuff related to finding jobs during the communication with other people. When we became
familiar with each other, there was a domestic student asking me to help him edit his resume. I felt I was actually better than I thought before.” The recognition he gained from other people encouraged him. When he graduated from school and began to look for a job, he believed that his ability to speak English and Mandarin gave him more opportunities.

However, Donna and Ted were experiencing another story.

To Donna, who already had good English proficiency before she came to Toronto, the language barrier related to cultural differences still made language a problem. When she first came to Toronto, she didn't think language was a problem. The reason she seldom joined in the class discussion was partly because she couldn’t understand what the class was talking about, partly because she found the topics irrelevant to her prior experiences. The concern for language became more intensive when she tried to find a job in the educational area. After she graduated and began to look for a job, she felt a lack of confidence in finding a job outside the Chinese community because she was a non-native English speaker, “The position is very competitive, and there are many white people with teacher certificate but still can’t find a job in public schools. It is hard to compete with the white people. Language is the first problem. It is impossible to speak English as well as a native. Even though after years of practice that your language is not a problem any more, you still have an Asian face. My working experiences before twenty are all in China.”

To Ted, the process of adjusting to the academic life at the University of
Toronto was becoming harder and harder as the language problem he met shifted more toward cultural difference. The failure to adjust to the dominant perspectives in his department made him lose confidence in his study. "I feel (it's hard to understand their perspective, because) the teacher will not explain the post-modern perspective explicitly, even though when they are doing research, this ideology has already permeated into their research. So if you haven’t learned that, it will be really hard to keep up with them in class. You have to learn it from the beginning all by yourself. It is hard for me. I have no background in this area."

6.2.3 More Than Language Proficiency—Language Barrier, Cultural Differences and Cultural Recognition

According to the existing literature, language barriers and cultural differences are two major problems faced by difficulties international students (Zhai, 2002; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen & Van, 2002; Yeh and Yang, 2003; Hsieh, 2006). The impacts on the adjustment to academic and social life of these two problems are often discussed separately. However, according to the narratives collected from the participants in this research, language barriers are closely related to cultural differences, and for some participants, cultural differences are the reason that makes language a barrier for them. Especially when locating language problems the students meet in a dynamic process, we can see that it is related to cultural differences.

As Malakloluunthu and Selan (2011) discussed, language barriers are not only about language proficiency, but also the cultural meaning deeply rooted it.
As experienced by Donna, she was constantly worried about her English proficiency because she was not a native-English speaker and she had very limited access to understand the meaning behind language. Whether it was commonly known abbreviated terms discussed in class or a bed-time story every Canadian grew up listening to, it is not the story or the words themselves that is hard to understand in English, but the meaning behind them that she is not familiar with.

Language barriers are also about whether the voice from another culture can be heard and recognized. This point can be supported by the different stories told by the participants in this research. The two students from the engineering area talked about how the recognition they gained for their contribution to their lab and their academic achievement helped them to gain confidence and made them believe that as long as they could communicate in English successfully, language would not be a problem to them anymore. However, to Ted, who studied in the Department of East Asian Studies, and Donna, who studied in OISE, the process was more negative. Both of them told stories about the difficulty to gain recognition from people around them because of the cultural differences. Especially for Ted, as a Chinese student in a department focused on East Asian studies, he found he had to fit into the dominant perspective held by most people in this department and he could not make use of what he had learnt before he arrived in Toronto. As he said, “I didn’t feel my Chinese cultural background can help me anything with my study here… They’re using western thinking to
analyze China. I can't find anyone who shares the same perspective with me in this area here.”

From the experiences of the international students, we can see that the lack of recognition of the cultural diversity brought in by international students may make the language barrier harder to overcome. When students had to develop a closer, deeper and more complicated relationship with the dominant culture, they have to fit in the dominant culture, and they have to mute their own voice of the different cultures they came from.

The lack of recognition of cultural diversity also reveals the deficit model employed in higher education and the labour market. No matter whether it is Donna who wants to find a job within the educational system in Toronto, or Ted, who works on East Asian studies, they find the adjustment process becomes harder and harder with the accumulation of their exposure to the dominant culture. The highly western-centered curriculum makes it hard for them to participate in class, and the lack of recognition of the different cultures brought into class by the international students decreases their confidence, and leads to the feeling of loss and confusion. As Ted said during his last interview, “...I find it is hard to integrate into the culture here no matter how good your English is.”

However, when discussed separately, the boundary put up by the lack of recognition of cultural differences becomes invisible, and language barrier becomes a personal problem that can only be resolved by the efforts made by students themselves, which makes it harder for international students to
overcome the language barrier and benefit from the diversity they bring in Canada.

6.3 Social Equity and International Students’ Multicultural Experience

One of the drawbacks of liberal multiculturalism is the superficial view of social equity, which is built on a “sameness” assumed among people (Guo, 2013). The impact of the “social equity” of liberal multiculturalism can be observed from the stories of the international students. In this part, three themes are examined to see how “social equity” is created based on the assumed “sameness” among international and domestic students, and how this “social equity” has been internalized by the international students. The three themes are: “Open and free” atmosphere, seeking support and legal identity.

6.3.1 The Impacts of the “Open and Free” Atmosphere

Most students talked about the open and free social atmosphere they felt during their academic and social life in Toronto.

When the students started their study at the University of Toronto, the open and free atmosphere gave them opportunities to explore the topics they were interested in. As Zac said, “My supervisor is very flexible. He gives me great space to explore what I want to do. It is important that at the beginning you have the space to explore the direction you want to follow.” Ted felt in the same way, he thought the free atmosphere in his department gave him a chance to think about the meaning of the studies he was doing now, and what he really wanted to do in the future. To Aron, the free and open atmosphere not only benefited him
academically, but also changed his perspective of his future. He used to focus on academia and to gain more advantages in academia, he applied for the Ph.D. program at the University of Toronto after he obtained a Masters degree. But after he arrived in Toronto, the free and open atmosphere changed his original plan. He eventually transferred to a Masters program. “My focus was on study, because I thought that to fulfill my expectation of future life ... The free and open atmospheres in the engineering department have influenced me a lot... I realized that I used to plan my future life in an unthoughtful way... I never thought there are other options for me, and there are more things I need to do and I’m able to do. Then I began to think only gaining a Ph.D. degree and publishing papers would not be enough to help me fulfill my life goal.”

However, this free and open atmosphere at school also caused the students problem in their academic life. “I never expected my supervisor to be so busy that he doesn’t have the time to have a look at what I am doing. At the beginning this was not a problem, but later it began to influence me. ... I need someone that is the expert in this area to guide me.” Zac said in one of the interviews. To Ted, this academic atmosphere made him feel lost, “I had expected that the academic atmosphere would be more open and loose than in China, but I didn’t expect it is this loose. I’m surprised by this. All my study is totally based on my own academic interest, and advisors will not interfere with what I’m doing. I’m not adapted to this loose atmosphere (because) I haven’t figured out what I want to
do with the topic I’m interested in, so I feel lost in this totally free academic atmosphere.”

6.3.2 Seeking Support in the “Open and Free” Atmosphere

Combined with the negative impacts of the “open and free” atmosphere is the problem of seeking support. The limited support aimed at international students and the presumption that international and domestic students are in the same situation result in the failure to adequately help international students to improve their experiences in Canada. For example, Ted talked about the problem he had in seeking help before he got used to the way of seeking help here: “everyone is very independent. No one will come to you to give you help unless you turn to others... They won’t offer their help if you don’t come to them, but being from another culture, I don’t know how to ask for help. I felt embarrassed and rude.” He said there was no support aimed at international students in his department: “As for international and domestic students, I don’t think there is any different treatment. Everyone is the same. At first I thought it was unfair for the international students who just arrive here.” To Ted, regarding the international and domestic students as the same was unfair to international students, especially for the new students, who just arrived and may easily experience the feeling of confusion and loss in an extremely independent and free environment.

Aron and Donna experienced a similar thing. They found that the services offered to international students didn’t help them efficiently because of the lack
of knowledge of what international students really need. “I found one problem of the language programs at the University of Toronto is that the teachers are all native English speakers. Sometimes I feel they can’t get to the points that the international students really want to know. They are teaching according to their understanding of learning English.” Aron talked about his experience of attending English writing and speaking class. Donna also said that despite the fact that she received good services for editing paper, she didn’t receive support for instruction on adapting to the different kinds of paper required in western curriculum, because “…the staffs working in the writing center are not clear about what international students really need and the difficulties these students are meeting. The services they offer are same to international and domestic students.”

6.3.3 Identity Problem in Finding a Job

Having experienced the “open and free” atmosphere at school and receiving services that regarded them as the same to domestic students, the participants in this research developed different perspectives on “social equity”, and the differences can be reflected in their attitudes towards the identity problem they encountered in the job search process.

Both Donna and Aron had encountered the problem related to their legal identity. Donna observed that “…most of the job positions emphasize ‘Canadian’ experience, and the employers hope their employees are ‘native English speakers’, and are Permanent Residents in Canada or Canadians.” Her legal
identity problem also made it hard for her to seek a better job opportunity: “…It is not easy for me to change a job now. I’m not a permanent resident, but I have applied for it. I’m still waiting for the result. Changing job in this period will influence the PR application... I’m worried they will check whether I’m still working when they work on my application. They want you to stay with a full-time job here.”

Aron also reported the same problem. He said, “I felt strange that two big oil companies began to request the applicants have Permanent Residents identity. They don’t have this before. It is like something you can only meet in the U.S.... But now in Canada, I found some companies begin to request specifically that the applicants should be the Permanent Residents in Toronto if they're not Canadian citizen.” But to him, it was not a problem, because, “It is the same to all the foreign people in Canada. It’s not unfair.” More importantly, Aron had been encouraged a great deal by the successful career stories of the previous Chinese immigrants. He thought that he “can’t blame the failure to find a job on Chinese identity.” He said, "If I can’t find a job, it must be my own fault."

6.3.4 The Inequity Beneath the Equal Surface

Gupta (1999) discussed that with the appearance of liberal multiculturalism, on the positive side, by making racism and discrimination illegal, it creates the possibility for the disempowered and marginalized groups to make progressive demands on the state. However, on the negative side, “it also produced a peculiar brand of ‘Canadian racism’ described by many as ‘polite’, ‘subtle’, ‘systemic’ and
even ‘democratic” (p.p. 190). The students’ stories in this research supported this perception.

On the one hand, the students benefit from the openness towards cultural diversity in the society. None of the students report experiences of being discriminated against because of their cultural backgrounds, and they feel there is no significant difference between minority and majority groups. Three of the students compared Canada to America when they talked about the equity they felt in Toronto. The open attitudes towards cultural diversity, development of Chinese community, and the fact that Toronto is an immigrant city are all the reasons contributing to this feeling.

But on the other hand, with their exposure to the dominant culture in Canada accumulating, they begin to report the feeling of isolation and confusion. The supports offered to them lack empathy because there is an assumed “sameness” among international and domestic students, and the supports are often offered from the point of view of local people. In academic life, when their majors have a cultural or social component, they have to fit into the western-centered curriculum and way of thinking. In the labor market, Canadian work experience is highly important, and being a foreigner limits their career choices.

The liberal multiculturalism experienced by international students, as discussed by Kubota (2004), is “political correctness with little substance” (p.p. 35). With a universal sameness assumed among international and domestic
students, a seemingly equal environment is created because every one is treated the same. However, to adjust to and participate in the mainstream culture, the students from minority groups are expected to assimilate into this universal identity. (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997)

The result of the creation of this superficial equity is the internalization of the perception that individuals can achieve what they want by working hard and the depoliticization of cultural diversity. In this way, the need to make changes to the power relationships that maintain the inequality is ignored.

**6.4 Chinese Community and International Students’ multicultural Experience**

**6.4.1 The Impacts of the Chinese Community on International students**

All the participants identified themselves as members within the Chinese community in Toronto. Throughout their life in Toronto, the Chinese community has been closely related to and significantly impacted them.

The Chinese community acts as a firm supporter for the international students. All of the participants had experiences of turning to the Chinese community for help. For example, Aron had been encouraged a great deal by the success of previous Chinese immigrants. Their experiences gave him confidence throughout his job search process. In addition, the Chinese community offered him an opportunity to have an idea about the unknown society before he got familiar with it. As he said, “When people first came here, they may feel lost and confused and wonder what the life is like here. Chinese community gives them
an opportunity to see how the other people's lives are like, and what they have already experienced. The newcomers will find that they have more options than they've expected.” Donna also benefited from the rich information she received from the Chinese students club and Chinese people who came here earlier than her.

The Chinese community also offers the international students more opportunities. Aron thought there were increasing job opportunities based on the achievement of the previous Chinese immigrants in Canada. As he said, “...the large number of Chinese people and the achievement of Chinese community to Canada are impossible to overlook. That Chinese people have made significant contribution in many important industries in Toronto is a great encouragement to the new immigrants here.”

Significantly, being part of the Chinese community also decreases the pressure to integrate into the cultural group outside the Chinese community, and made it easier to adjust to life in Toronto. On the one hand, less pressure to integrate mitigates the feeling of being in a minority group. As Ted said, “It’s not like the U.S. In America if you don’t fit into their culture, you become a member of the minority groups. Here I don’t feel this way. There is no difference between minority and majority. I feel it’s equal.” Donna’s experiences also support this perception. She said the development of the Chinese community gave her confidence and she never felt like being in a minority group. On the other hand, the large population of Chinese people living in the Chinese community
decreases their motivation to integrate with other cultural groups. Ted said that even though he experienced many changes in his academic life, he felt no change in his private life after he came here. He said, “I feel there is no change in my lifestyle (laugh). Actually I feel that there is no need (to integrate)... After all Canada is a multicultural country.”

This separation between private life and public sphere such as workplace or school described by Ted can also be found in the experiences of other participants. For example, Aron said he didn’t experience a problem integrating with people from other cultural backgrounds at his workplace, but he preferred to stay with Chinese friends. As he said, “For integration, I don’t feel I have problem. I didn’t have experiences of not getting along with people at the lab, workplace or the club I’m in (because of cultural differences)... In my private life, most of my friends are Chinese people... I feel good this way. To me, I feel close to Chinese people.” Zac also had similar experiences. After the first months of adjusting to his department, he got along well with his colleagues, and he regards his office a good place to know other cultures. Group discussion and working together on the same projects are good opportunities to get to know people from other backgrounds. In his private life, he spent most of his time with Chinese friends. He felt it was very relaxing and easier to interact with people from the same culture.

6.4.2 Different Perspectives
Most impacts from the Chinese community are regarded as positive by the participants. They feel it eliminates the pressure to fit into other cultures, especially for Zac and Aron, who had reported more positive experiences at school and workplace. For them, they didn’t have isolated feelings or problems of participating in group activities in the public sphere. And after study and work, they enjoyed the time with their friends from the Chinese community, who shared more cultural similarities with them. But there are also some impacts students regard as negative. Donna, for example, after working in the Chinese community for half a year, wanted to seek more opportunities outside the Chinese community. As she said, “...I feel on the one hand, Chinese community gives me much support and makes me feel secure. Because of the development of the Chinese community here, I don’t feel I’m from a minority group. But on the other hand, through my experiences of finding job, I find the job opportunity is very limited in the Chinese community. The job positions offer less benefit than the job positions from the western company.”

Ted talked about the limits he felt when he wanted to reach out to people from other cultures, “When it is outside school, I don’t feel the need to join in the local people’s community, nor will they volunteer to know more about me. The most time I spend with people from other cultures is at the M.A. room, our office...The ways I get to know people are very limited, I feel. And people here are more independent. It’s hard to build a more stable relationship.

6.4.3 Strong and Weak multiculturalism
When discussing the practice of multiculturalism, some authors have come up with the idea of “weak” and “strong” multiculturalism (Grillo, 2007; Dan, 2010). As Dan (2010) concluded, “In the first case, cultural diversity is only recognized in the private sphere, whereas in the institutional public sphere (work, education, etc.), policies encouraging the assimilation of immigrants and ethnic minorities predominate. In the case of “strong” multiculturalism, there is recognition of ethnic-cultural differences and communities in the public sphere.” (p.p. 254)

The experiences of participants in this research suggest that in the public sphere, international students need to fit into the dominant culture, and they struggle to have the culture they brought with them recognized, especially those whose studies or jobs have an explicit cultural component. Aron talked about the efforts he made to integrate in his lab and workplace. He said he would “switch” to a western way at the workplace. Ted described his academic life and private life in this way: “(For my studies,) I felt I’m always following the Western way of thinking while I talk with them. You have no way. You have to use their way to prove your perspective”. For Donna, who tried to find work in the educational area, felt uncertain about her career future because of the job requirements, which highly valued employees’ Canadian working experiences and the preference of Canadian citizens to foreigners.

Despite the fact that the Chinese community plays a significant role in supporting international students’ life abroad, the participants’ experiences
reveal that efforts are still needed to achieve a “stronger” multiculturalism, where the cultural differences can be recognized and respected in both the private and public sphere.

**6.5 Conclusion**

Using a critical multiculturalism approach, my research challenges the dominant ideology of liberal multiculturalism, which attributes the difficulties international students meet to only personal factors, and shifts the attention away from the existing social structures and framework of multiculturalism, which employs a deficit model of the different cultures brought in by international students.

Through comparing and examining the similarities and differences among the narratives, we can see that the lack of recognition of cultural diversity, evaluating cultural diversity in a deficit model, failure to show empathy with students from different cultural backgrounds, the assumption of a “sameness” among international and domestic students, and stress to assimilate into the dominant culture in the public sphere are all the factors that contribute to the pressure faced by international students.
Chapter 7

Conclusion and Considerations

In a research paper written around 20 years ago, the author illustrated the life of international students in America through a picture showing how limited the life abroad can be for them. In the picture, the students leave their home country, float over the ocean and arrive at a tiny lonely island, where they gather together and find themselves as outsiders in the dominant culture of the host country. The author described international students as an island surrounded by the water of the different culture of the host country. As it is said, “No man is an island.” However, these international students as a group, with little recognition of their prior culture, language barrier and the loss of previous interpersonal relationships, are like an island separated from the mainland. (Shen, 1996)

Almost twenty years later, when I organized the narratives collected from the participants, I thought of the picture of the lonely island. Some changes can be added to this picture, while part of the picture still works for the situations faced by the international students in this study.

On the one hand, from the narratives we can see that international students’ experiences have been improved. Having benefitted from the openness to cultural differences, increasing support for international students, and the development of the Chinese community, participants in this research reported many positive experiences. However, on the other hand, the lack of recognition
of cultural diversity, evaluating cultural diversity in a deficit model, failure to show empathy to students from different cultural backgrounds, assumption of a “sameness” among international and domestic students, and stress to assimilate into the dominant culture in the public sphere still exist and impede international students’ adjustment to the life abroad.

My research into the multicultural experiences of Chinese international students at the University of Toronto challenges the dominant ideology of liberal multiculturalism, which attributes the difficulties international students meet in their life abroad to only personal factors, and shifts the attention away from the existing social structures and framework of multiculturalism which employ a deficit model when evaluating different cultures brought in by international students. For the international students struggling to gain recognition of their cultural identities and to integrate into mainstream society, one of the key questions is when and how the huge gap between the island and the society of host country can be filled.

My research shows the different situations students meet in their academic life and job search processes. Students with science and technology backgrounds and skills reported more positive experiences, while students whose studies and career plan have an explicit cultural aspect reported more negative experiences. This phenomenon reveals that with a long-lasting tradition of recruiting and taking in immigrants for economic interest and meeting the demand of labor market (Guo, 2013), international students with professional skills are benefiting
from more open attitudes to people from different cultures at the job market. However, this openness is on a superficial level. The cultural diversity brought in by international students is still not recognized.

This research can help higher education institutions improve the academic life of international students. Besides the support offered to international students regarding their language proficiency, job hunting and immigration, the active recognition of the cultures brought in by international students from their prior cultural background would be dispensable to show fuller hospitality. As suggested by Hsieh (2006) in her paper, students should claim their right to speak as much as gain linguistic skill. In addition to the efforts that can be made by international students themselves, we should never ignore the importance of having the voice of the international students heard. Moreover, the existing support will benefit international students more if the assumed “sameness” among domestic and international students can be removed, and the support can be more sensitive to the different situations faced by the students.

The research can also serve as a resource for policy makers in Canada. At a policy level, since the 1980s, Canadian governments have placed great emphasis on human capital and the economic benefits of immigrants. In the 1990s, the federal integration strategy was introduced, and since then, the emphasis of dealing with cultural diversity shifted to integration (Esses and Gardner, 1996). However, the problem of cultural exclusion still exists in the job market and educational institutions. The emphasis on Canadian working experiences and
even their legal identity make it harder for international students to settle down and integrate in Canada.

This research shows that to create a fully hospitable environment for international students, more effort should be made to reduce the factors that influence them negatively.
References


